John Gabriel Borkman

Henrik Ibsen

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JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN.

by

HENRIK IBSEN

Translation and Introduction by William Archer.

INTRODUCTION.*

The anecdotic history of *John Gabriel Borkman* is even scantier than that of *Little Eyolf*. It is true that two mentions of it occur in Ibsen's letters, but they throw no light whatever upon its spiritual antecedents. Writing to George Brandes from Christiania, on April 24, 1896, Ibsen says: "In your last letter you make the suggestion that I should visit London. If I knew enough English, I might perhaps go. But as I unfortunately do not, I must give up the idea altogether. Besides, I am engaged in preparing for a big new work, and I do not wish to put off the writing of it longer than necessary. It might so easily happen that a roof-tile fell on my head before I had 'found time to make the last verse.' And what then?" On October 3 of the same year, writing to the same correspondent, he again alludes to his work as "a new long play, which must be completed as soon as possible." It was, as a matter of fact, completed with very little delay, for it appeared in Copenhagen on December 15, 1896.

The irresponsible gossip of the time made out that Bjornson discerned in the play some personal allusions to himself; but this Bjornson emphatically denied. I am not aware that any attempt has been made to identify the original of the various characters. It need scarcely be pointed out that in the sisters Gunhild and Ella we have the pair of women, one strong and masterful, the other tender and devoted, who run through so many of Ibsen's plays, from *The Feast at Solhoug* onwards—nay, even from *Catalina*. In my Introduction to *The Lady from the Sea* (p. xxii) it is pointed out that Ibsen had the character of Foldal clearly in his mind when, in March 1880, he made the first draft of that play. The character there appears as: "The old married clerk. Has written a play in his youth which was only once acted. Is for ever touching it up, and lives in the illusion that it will be published and will make a great success. Takes no steps, however, to bring this about. Nevertheless accounts himself one of the 'literary' class. His wife and children believe blindly in the play." By the time Foldal actually came to life, the faith of his wife and children had sadly dwindled away.

There was scarcely a theatre in Scandinavia or Finland at which *John Gabriel Borkman* was not acted in the course of January 1897. Helsingors led the way with performances both at the Swedish and the Finnish Theatres on January 10. Christiania and Stockholm followed on January 25, Copenhagen on January 31; and meanwhile the piece had been presented at many provincial theatres as well. In Christiania, Borkman, Gunhild, and Ella were played by Garmann, Fru Gundersen, and Froken Reimers respectively; in Copenhagen, by Emil Pousen, Fru Eckhardt, and Fru Hennings. In the course of 1897 it spread all over Germany, beginning with Frankfort on Main, where, oddly enough, it was somewhat maltreated by the Censorship. In London, an organization calling itself the New Century Theatre presented *John Gabriel Borkman* at the Strand Theatre on the afternoon of May 3, 1897, with Mr. W. H. Vernon as Borkman, Miss Genevieve Ward as Gunhild, Miss Elizabeth Robins as Ella Rentheim, Mr. Martin Harvey as

Erhart, Mr. James Welch as Foldal, and Mrs. Beerbohm Tree as Mrs. Wilton. The first performance in America was given by the Criterion Independent Theatre of New York on November 18, 1897, Mr. E. J. Henley playing Borkman, Mr. John Blair Erhart, Miss Maude Banks Gunhild, and Miss Ann Warrington Ella. For some reason, which I can only conjecture to be the weakness of the the third act, the play seems nowhere to have taken a very firm hold on the stage.

Dr. Brahm has drawn attention to the great similarity between the theme of *John Gabriel Borkman* and that of *Pillars of Society*. "In both," he says, "we have a business man of great ability who is guilty of a crime; in both this man is placed between two sisters; and in both he renounces a marriage of inclination for the sake of a marriage that shall further his business interests." The likeness is undeniable; and yet how utterly unlike are the two plays! and how immeasurably superior the later one! It may seem, on a superficial view, that in *John Gabriel Borkman* Ibsen has returned to prose and the common earth after his excursion into poetry and the possibly supernatural, if I may so call it, in *The Master Builder* and *Little Eyolf*. But this is a very superficial view indeed. We have only to compare the whole invention of *John Gabriel Borkman* with the invention of *Pillars of Society*, to realise the difference between the poetry and the prose of drama. The quality of imagination which conceived the story of the House of Bernick is utterly unlike that which conceived the tragedy of the House of Borkman. The difference is not greater between (say)*The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear*.

The technical feat which Ibsen here achieves of carrying through without a single break the whole action of a four-act play has been much commented on and admired. The imaginary time of the drama is actually shorter than the real time of representation, since the poet does not even leave intervals for the changing of the scenes. This feat, however, is more curious than important. Nothing particular is gained by such a literal observance of the unity of time. For the rest, we feel definitely in *John Gabriel Borkman* what we already felt vaguely in *Little Eyolf*—that the poet's technical staying-power is beginning to fail him. We feel that the initial design was larger and more detailed than the finished work. If the last acts of *The Wild Duck* and *Hedda Gabler* be compared with the last acts of *Little Eyolf* and *Borkman*, it will be seen that in the earlier plays it relaxes towards the close, to make room for pure imagination and lyric beauty. The actual drama is over long before the curtain falls on either play, and in the one case we have Rita and Allmers, in the other Ella and Borkman, looking back over their shattered lives and playing chorus to their own tragedy. For my part, I set the highest value on these choral odes, these mournful antiphones, in which the poet definitely triumphs over the mere playwright. They seem to me noble and beautiful in themselves, and as truly artistic, if not as theatrical, as any abrupter catastrophe could be. But I am not quite sure that they are exactly the conclusions the poet originally projected, and still less am I satisfied that they are reached by precisely the paths which he at first designed to pursue.

The traces of a change of scheme in *John Gabriel Borkman* seem to me almost unmistakable. The first two acts laid the foundation for a larger and more complex superstructure than is ultimately erected. Ibsen seems to have designed that Hinkel, the man who "betrayed" Borkman in the past, should play some efficient part in the alienation of Erhart from his family and home. Otherwise, why this insistence on a "party" at the Hinkels', which is apparently to serve as a sort of "send-off" for Erhart and Mrs. Wilton? It appears in the third act that the "party" was imaginary. "Erhart and I were the whole party," says Mrs. Wilton, "and little Frida, of course." We might, then, suppose it to have been a mere blind to enable Erhart to escape from home; but, in the first place, as Erhart does not live at home, there is no need for any such pretext; in the second place, it appears that the trio do actually go to the Hinkels' house (since Mrs. Borkman's servant finds them there), and do actually make it their starting-point. Erhart comes and goes with the utmost freedom in Mrs. Wilton's own house; what possible reason can they have for not setting out from there? No reason is shown or hinted. We cannot even imagine that the Hinkels have been instrumental in bringing Erhart and Mrs. Wilton together; it is expressly stated that Erhart made her acquaintance and saw a great deal of her in town, before she moved out to the country. The whole conception of the party at the Hinkels' is, as it stands, mysterious and a little cumbersome. We are forced to conclude, I think, that something more was at one time intended to come of it, and that, when the poet abandoned the idea, he did not think it worth while to remove the scaffolding. To this change of plan, too, we may possibly trace what I take to be the one serious flaw in the the play—the comparative weakness of the second half of the third act. The scene of Erhart's rebellion against the claims of the mother, aunt, and father strikes one as the symmetrical working out of a problem rather than a passage of living drama.

All this means, of course, that there is a certain looseness of fibre in *John Gabriel Borkman* which we do not find in the best of Ibsen's earlier works. But in point of intellectual power and poetic beauty it yields to none of its predecessors. The conception of the three leading figures is one of the great things of literature; the second act, with the exquisite humour of the Foldal scene, and the dramatic intensity of the encounter between Borkman and Ella, is perhaps the finest single act Ibsen ever wrote, in prose at all events; and the last scene is a thing of rare and exalted beauty. One could wish that the poet's last words to us had been those haunting lines with which Gunhild and Ella join hands over Borkman's body:

> We twin sisters—over him we both have loved.
>
> We two shadows—over the dead man.

Among many verbal difficulties which this play presents, the greatest, perhaps, has been to find an equivalent for the word "opreisning," which occurs again and again in the first and second acts. No one English word that I could discover would fit in all the different contexts; so I have had to employ three: "redemption," "restoration," and in one place "rehabilitation."

The reader may bear in mind that these three terms represent one idea in the original.
Borkman in Act II. uses a very odd expression—"overskurkens moral," which I have rendered "the morals of the higher rascality." I cannot but suspect (though for this I have no authority) that in the word "overskurk," which might be represented in German by "Ueberschurke," Borkman is parodying the expression "Uebermensch," of which so much has been heard of late. When I once suggested this to Ibsen, he neither affirmed nor denied it. I understood him to say, however, that in speaking of "overskurken" he had a particular man in view. Somewhat pusillanimously, perhaps, I pursued my inquiries no further.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN (1896)

PERSONS.
JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN, formerly Managing Director of a Bank.
MRS. GUNHILD BORKMAN, his wife.
ERHART BORKMAN, their son, a student.
MISS ELLA RENTHEIM, Mrs. Borkman's twin sister.
MRS. FANNY WILTON.
VILHELM FOLDAL, subordinate clerk in a Government office.
FRIDA FOLDAL, his daughter.
MRS. BORKMAN'S MAID.

The action passes one winter evening, at the Manorhouse of the Rentheim family, in the neighbourhood of Christiania.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN
PLAY IN FOUR ACTS
ACT FIRST

MRS. BORKMAN's drawing-room, furnished with old-fashioned, faded splendour. At the back, an open sliding-door leads into a garden-room, with windows and a glass door. Through it a view over the garden; twilight with driving snow. On the right, a door leading from the hall. Further forward, a large old-fashioned iron stove, with the fire lighted. On the left, towards the back, a single smaller door. In front, on the same side, a window, covered with thick curtains. Between the window and the door a horsehair sofa, with a table in front of it covered with a cloth. On the table, a lighted lamp with a shade. Beside the stove a high-backed armchair.
MRS. GUNHILD BORKMAN sits on the sofa, crocheting. She is an elderly lady, of cold, distinguished appearance, with stiff carriage and immobile features. Her abundant hair is very grey. Delicate transparent hands. Dressed in a gown of heavy dark silk, which has originally been handsome, but is now somewhat worn and shabby. A woollen shawl over her shoulders.
She sits for a time erect and immovable at her crochet. Then the bells of a

passing sledge are heard.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Listens; her eyes sparkle with gladness and she involuntarily whispers]. Erhart! At last!
[She rises and draws the curtain a little aside to look out. Appears disappointed, and sits down to her work again, on the sofa. Presently THE MAID enters from the hall with a visiting card on a small tray.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Quickly.] Has Mr. Erhart come after all?
THE MAID.
No, ma'am. But there's a lady——
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Laying aside her crochet.] Oh, Mrs. Wilton, I suppose——
THE MAID.
[Approaching.] No, it's a strange lady——
MRS. BORKMAN. [Taking the card.] Let me see—— [Reads it; rises hastily and looks intently at the girl.] Are you sure this is for me?
THE MAID.
Yes, I understand it was for you, ma'am.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Did she say she wanted to see Mrs. Borkman?
THE MAID.
Yes, she did.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Shortly, resolutely.] Good. Then say I am at home.
[THE MAID opens the door for the strange lady and goes out. MISS ELLA RENTHEIM enters. She resembles her sister; but her face has rather a suffering than a hard expression. It still shows signs of great beauty, combined with strong character. She has a great deal of hair, which is drawn back from the forehead in natural ripples, and is snow-white. She is dressed in black velvet, with a hat and a fur-lined cloak of the same material.
[The two sisters stand silent for a time, and look searchingly at each other. Each is evidently waiting for the other to speak first.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Who has remained near the door.] You are surprised to see me, Gunhild.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Standing erect and immovable between the sofa and the table, resting her finger-tips upon the cloth.] Have you not made a mistake? The bailiff lives in the side wing, you know.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
It is not the bailiff I want to see to-day.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Is it me you want, then?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes. I have a few words to say to you.

MRS. BORKMAN. [Coming forward into the middle of the room.] Well—then sit down.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Thank you. I can quite well stand for the present.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Just as you please. But at least loosen your cloak.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Unbuttoning her cloak.] Yes, it is very warm here.

MRS. BORKMAN.

I am always cold.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Stands looking at her for a time with her arms resting on the back of the armchair.] Well, Gunhild, it is nearly eight years now since we saw each other last.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[Coldly.] Since last we spoke to each other at any rate.

ELLA RENTHEIM. True, since we spoke to each other. I daresay you have seen me now and again—when I came on my yearly visit to the bailiff.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Once or twice, I have.

ELLA RENTHEIM. I have caught one or two glimpses of you, too—there, at the window.

MRS. BORKMAN. You must have seen me through the curtains then. You have good eyes. [Harshly and cuttingly.] But the last time we spoke to each other—it was here in this room——

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Trying to stop her.] Yes, yes; I know, Gunhild!

MRS. BORKMAN.

—the week before he—before he was let out.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Moving towards the back.] O, don't speak about that.

MRS. BORKMAN. [Firmly, but in a low voice.] It was the week before he—was set at liberty.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Coming down.] Oh yes, yes, yes! I shall never forget that time! But it is too terrible to think of! Only to recall it for the moment—oh!

MRS. BORKMAN. [Gloomily.] And yet one's thoughts can never get away from it. [Vehemently; clenching her hands together.] No, I can't understand how such a thing—how anything so horrible can come upon one single family! And then—that it should be our family! So old a family as ours! Think of its choosing us out!

ELLA RENTHEIM. Oh, Gunhild—there were many, many families besides ours that that blow fell upon.

MRS. BORKMAN. Oh yes; but those others don't trouble me very much. For in their case it was only a matter of a little money—or some papers. But for us——! For me! And then for Erhart! My little boy—as he then was! [In

rising excitement.] The shame that fell upon us two innocent ones! The dishonour! The hateful, terrible dishonour! And then the utter ruin too!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Cautiously.] Tell me, Gunhild, how does he bear it?
MRS. BORKMAN.
Erhart, do you mean?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
No—he himself. How does he bear it?
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Scornfully.] Do you think I ever ask about that?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Ask? Surely you do not require to ask——
MRS. BORKMAN. [Looks at her in surprise.] You don't suppose I ever have anything to do with him? That I ever meet him? That I see anything of him?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Not even that!
MRS. BORKMAN. [As before.] The man was in gaol, in gaol for five years! [Covers her face with her hands.] Oh, the crushing shame of it! [With increased vehemence.] And then to think of all that the name of John Gabriel Borkman used to mean! No, no, no—I can never see him again! Never!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Looks at her for a while.] You have a hard heart, Gunhild.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Towards him, yes.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
After all, he is your husband.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Did he not say in court that it was I who began his ruin? That
I spent money so recklessly?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Tentatively.] But is there not some truth in that?
MRS. BORKMAN. Why, it was he himself that made me do it! He insisted on our living in such an absurdly lavish style——
ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, I know. But that is just where you should have restrained him; and apparently you didn't.
MRS. BORKMAN. How was I to know that it was not his own money he gave me to squander? And that he himself used to squander, too—ten times more than I did!
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Quietly.] Well, I daresay his position forced him to do that— to some extent at any rate.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Scornfully.] Yes, it was always the same story—we were to "cut a figure." And he did "cut a figure" to some purpose! He used to drive about with a four-in-hand as if he were a king. And he had people bowing and scraping to him just as to a king. [With a laugh.] And they always called him by his Christian names—all the country over—as if he

had been the king himself. "John Gabriel," "John Gabriel," "John Gabriel." Every one knew what a great man "John Gabriel" was!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Warmly and emphatically.] He was a great man then.

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, to all appearance. But he never breathed a single word to me as to his real position—never gave a hint as to where he got his means from.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

No, no; and other people did not dream of it either.

MRS. BORKMAN. I don't care about the other people. But it was his duty to tell me the truth. And that he never did! He kept on lying to me—lying abominably——

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Interrupting.] Surely not, Gunhild. He kept things back perhaps, but I am sure he did not lie.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Well, well; call it what you please; it makes no difference.
And then it all fell to pieces—the whole thing.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [To herself.] Yes, everything fell to pieces—for him—and for others.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[Drawing herself up menacingly.] But I tell you this, Ella,
I do not give in yet! I shall redeem myself yet—you may make
up your mind to that!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Eagerly.] Redeem yourself! What do you mean by that?

MRS. BORKMAN. Redeem my name, and honour, and fortune! Redeem my ruined life— that is what I mean! I have some one in reserve, let me tell you— one who will wash away every stain that he has left.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Gunhild! Gunhild!

MRS. BORKMAN. [With rising excitement.] There is an avenger living, I tell you! One who will make up to me for all his father's sins!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Erhart you mean.

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, Erhart, my own boy! He will redeem the family, the house, the name. All that can be redeemed.—And perhaps more besides.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

And how do you think that is to be done?

MRS. BORKMAN. It must be done as best it can; I don't know how. But I know that it must and shall be done. [Looks searchingly at her.] Come now, Ella; isn't that really what you have had in mind too, ever since he was a child?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

No, I can't exactly say that.

MRS. BORKMAN. No? Then why did you take charge of him when the

storm broke upon—upon this house?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
You could not look after him yourself at that time, Gunhild.
MRS. BORKMAN. No, no, I could not. And his father—he had a valid enough excuse—while he was there—in safe keeping——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Indignant.] Oh, how can you say such things!—You!
MRS. BORKMAN. [With a venomous expression.] And how could you make up your mind to take charge of the child of a—a John Gabriel! Just as if he had been your own? To take the child away from me—home with you—and keep him there year after year, until the boy was nearly grown up. [Looking suspiciously at her.] What was your real reason, Ella? Why did you keep him with you?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I came to love him so dearly——
MRS. BORKMAN.
More than I—his mother?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Evasively.] I don't know about that. And then, you know,
Erhart was rather delicate as a child——
MRS. BORKMAN.
Erhart—delicate!
ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, I thought so—at that time at any rate. And you know the air of the west coast is so much milder than here.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Smiling bitterly.] H'm—is it indeed? [Breaking off.] Yes, it is true you have done a great deal for Erhart. [With a change of tone.] Well, of course, you could afford it. [Smiling.] You were so lucky, Ella; you managed to save all your money.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Hurt.] I did not manage anything about it, I assure you. I had no idea—until long, long afterwards—that the securities belonging to me—that they had been left untouched.
MRS. BORKMAN. Well, well; I don't understand anything about these things! I only say you were lucky. [Looking inquiringly at her.] But when you, of your own accord, undertook to educate Erhart for me—what was your motive in that?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Looking at her.] My motive?
MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, some motive you must have had. What did you want to do with him? To make of him, I mean?
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Slowly.] I wanted to smooth the way for Erhart to happiness in life.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Contemptuously.] Pooh—people situated as we are have something else than happiness to think of.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
What, then?

MRS. BORKMAN. [Looking steadily and earnestly at her.] Erhart has in the first place to make so brilliant a position for himself, that no trace shall be left of the shadow his father has cast upon my name—and my son's.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Searchingly.] Tell me, Gunhild, is this what Erhart himself demands of his life?
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Slightly taken aback.] Yes, I should hope so!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Is it not rather what you demand of him?
MRS. BORKMAN. [Curtly.] Erhart and I always make the same demands upon ourselves.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Sadly and slowly.] You are so very certain of your boy, then, Gunhild?
MRS. BORKMAN. [With veiled triumph.] Yes, that I am—thank Heaven. You may be sure of that!
ELLA RENTHEIM. Then I should think in reality you must be happy after all; in spite of all the rest.
MRS. BORKMAN. So I am—so far as that goes. But then, every moment, all the rest comes rushing in upon me like a storm.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [With a change of tone.] Tell me—you may as well tell me at once—for that is really what I have come for——
MRS. BORKMAN.
What?
ELLA RENTHEIM. Something I felt I must talk to you about.—Tell me—Erhart does not live out here with—with you others?
MRS. BORKMAN. [Harshly.] Erhart cannot live out here with me. He has to live in town——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
So he wrote to me.
MRS. BORKMAN. He must, for the sake of his studies. But he comes out to me for a little while every evening.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Well, may I see him then? May I speak to him at once?
MRS. BORKMAN.
He has not come yet; but I expect him every moment.
ELLA RENTHEIM. Why, Gunhild, surely he must have come. I can hear his footsteps overhead.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[With a rapid upward glance.] Up in the long gallery?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes. I have heard him walking up and down there ever since I came.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Looking away from her.] That is not Erhart, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Surprised.] Not Erhart? [Divining.] Who is it then?
MRS. BORKMAN.
It is he.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Softly, with suppressed pain.] Borkman? John Gabriel Borkman?
MRS. BORKMAN. He walks up and down like that—backwards and forwards—from morning to night—day out and day in.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I have heard something of this——
MRS. BORKMAN.
I daresay. People find plenty to say about us, no doubt.
ELLA RENTHEIM. Erhart has spoken of it in his letters. He said that his father generally remained by himself—up there—and you alone down here.
MRS. BORKMAN. Yes; that is how it has been, Ella, ever since they let him out, and sent him home to me. All these long eight years.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I never believed it could really be so. It seemed impossible!
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Nods.] It is so; and it can never be otherwise.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Looking at her.] This must be a terrible life, Gunhild.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Worse than terrible—almost unendurable.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, it must be.
MRS. BORKMAN. Always to hear his footsteps up there—from early morning till far into the night. And everything sounds so clear in this house!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, it is strange how clear the sound is.
MRS. BORKMAN.
I often feel as if I had a sick wolf pacing his cage up there in the gallery, right over my head. [Listens and whispers.] Hark! Do you hear! Backwards and forwards, up and down, goes the wolf.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Tentatively.] Is no change possible, Gunhild?
MRS. BORKMAN. [With a gesture of repulsion.] He has never made any movement towards a change.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Could you not make the first movement, then?
MRS. BORKMAN. [Indignantly.] I! After all the wrong he has done me! No thank you! Rather let the wolf go on prowling up there.
ELLA RENTHEIM. This room is too hot for me. You must let me take off my things after all.
MRS. BORKMAN.

Yes, I asked you to.

[ELLA RENTHEIM takes off her hat and cloak and lays them on a chair beside the door leading to the hall.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Do you never happen to meet him, away from home?

MRS. BORKMAN.

[With a bitter laugh.] In society, do you mean?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I mean, when he goes out walking. In the woods, or——

MRS. BORKMAN.

He never goes out.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Not even in the twilight?

MRS. BORKMAN.

Never.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[With emotion.] He cannot bring himself to go out?

MRS. BORKMAN. I suppose not. He has his great cloak and his hat hanging in the cupboard—the cupboard in the hall, you know——

ELLA RENTHEIM. [To herself.] The cupboard we used to hide in when we were little.

MRS. BORKMAN. [Nods.] And now and then—late in the evening—I can hear him come down as though to go out. But he always stops when he is halfway downstairs, and turns back—straight back to the gallery.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Quietly.] Do none of his old friends ever come up to see him?

MRS. BORKMAN.

He has no old friends.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

He had so many—once.

MRS. BORKMAN. H'm! He took the best possible way to get rid of them. He was a dear friend to his friends, was John Gabriel.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Oh, yes, that is true, Gunhild.

MRS. BORKMAN. [Vehemently.] All the same, I call it mean, petty, base, contemptible of them, to think so much of the paltry losses they may have suffered through him. They were only money losses, nothing more.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Not answering her.] So he lives up there quite alone.

Absolutely by himself.

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, practically so. They tell me an old clerk or copyist or something comes out to see him now and then.

ELLA RENTHEIM. Ah, indeed; no doubt it is a man called Foldal. I know they were friends as young men.

MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, I believe they were. But I know nothing about him.

He was quite outside our circle—when we had a circle——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
So he comes out to see Borkman now?
MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, he condescends to. But of course he only comes when it is dark.
ELLA RENTHEIM. This Foldal—he was one of those that suffered when the bank failed?
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Carelessly.] Yes, I believe I heard he had lost some money.
But no doubt it was something quite trifling.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[With slight emphasis.] It was all he possessed.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Smiling.] Oh, well; what he possessed must have been little enough—nothing to speak of.
ELLA RENTHEIM. And he did not speak of it—Foldal I mean—during the investigation.
MRS. BORKMAN. At all events, I can assure you Erhart has made ample amends for any little loss he may have suffered.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[With surprise.] Erhart! How can Erhart have done that?
MRS. BORKMAN. He has taken an interest in Foldal's youngest daughter. He has taught her things, and put her in the way of getting employment, and some day providing for herself. I am sure that is a great deal more than her father could ever have done for her.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, I daresay her father can't afford to do much.
MRS. BORKMAN.
And then Erhart has arranged for her to have lessons in music.
She has made such progress already that she can come up to—to
him in the gallery, and play to him.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
So he is still fond of music?
MRS. BORKMAN. Oh yes, I suppose he is. Of course he has the piano you sent out here—when he was expected back——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
And she plays to him on it?
MRS. BORKMAN.
Yes, now and then—in the evenings. That is Erhart's doing, too.
ELLA RENTHEIM. Has the poor girl to come all the long way out here, and then back to town again?
MRS. BORKMAN. No, she doesn't need to. Erhart has arranged for her to stay with a lady who lives near us—a Mrs. Wilton——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[With interest.] Mrs. Wilton?
MRS. BORKMAN.

A very rich woman. You don't know her.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I have heard her name. Mrs. Fanny Wilton, is it not——?
MRS. BORKMAN.
Yes, quite right.
ELLA RENTHEIM. Erhart has mentioned her several times. Does she live out here now?
MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, she has taken a villa here; she moved out from town some time ago.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [With a slight hesitation.] They say she is divorced from her husband.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Her husband has been dead for several years.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, but they were divorced. He got a divorce.
MRS. BORKMAN. He deserted her, that is what he did. I am sure the fault wasn't hers.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Do you know her at all intimately, Gunhild?
MRS. BORKMAN. Oh yes, pretty well. She lives close by here; and she looks in every now and then.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
And do you like her?
MRS. BORKMAN.
She is unusually intelligent; remarkably clear in her judgments.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
In her judgments of people, do you mean?
MRS. BORKMAN.
Yes, principally of people. She has made quite a study of Erhart; looked deep into his character—into his soul. And the result is she idolises him, as she could not help doing.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [With a touch of finesse.] Then perhaps she knows Erhart still better than she knows you?
MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, Erhart saw a good deal of her in town, before she came out here.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Without thinking.] And in spite of that she moved out of town?
MRS. BORKMAN. [Taken aback, looking keenly at her.] In spite of that! What do you mean?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Evasively.] Oh, nothing particular.
MRS. BORKMAN.
You said it strangely—you did mean something by it, Ella!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Looking her straight in the eyes.] Yes, that is true, Gunhild!

I did mean something by it.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Well, then, say it right out.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
First let me tell you, I think I too have a certain claim upon Erhart. Do you think I haven't?
MRS. BORKMAN. [Glancing round the room.] No doubt—after all the money you have spent upon him.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Oh, not on that account, Gunhild. But because I love him.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Smiling scornfully.] Love my son? Is it possible? You? In spite of everything?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, it is possible—in spite of everything. And it is true. I love Erhart—as much as I can love any one—now—at my time of life.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Well, well, suppose you do: what then?
ELLA RENTHEIM. Why, then, I am troubled as soon as I see anything threatening him.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Threatening Erhart! Why, what should threaten him? Or who?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
You in the first place—in your way.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Vehemently.] I!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
And then this Mrs. Wilton, too, I am afraid.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Looks at her for a moment in speechless surprise.] And you think such things of Erhart! Of my own boy! He, who has his great mission to fulfil!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Lightly.] Oh, his mission!
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Indignantly.] How dare you say that so scornfully?
ELLA RENTHEIM. Do you think a young man of Erhart's age, full of health and spirits—do you think he is going to sacrifice himself for—for such a thing as a "mission"?
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Firmly and emphatically.] Erhart will! I know he will.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Shaking her head.] You neither know it nor believe it, Gunhild.
MRS. BORKMAN.
I don't believe it!
ELLA RENTHEIM. It is only a dream that you cherish. For if you hadn't

that to cling to, you feel that you would utterly despair.
MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, indeed I should despair. [Vehemently.] And I daresay that is what you would like to see, Ella!
ELLA RENTHEIM. [With head erect.] Yes, I would rather see that than see you "redeem" yourself at Erhart's expense.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Threateningly.] You want to come between us? Between mother and son? You?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I want to free him from your power—your will—your despotism.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Triumphantly.] You are too late! You had him in your nets all these years—until he was fifteen. But now I have won him again, you see!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Then I will win him back from you! [Hoarsely, half whispering.] We two have fought a life-and-death battle before, Gunhild—for a man's soul!
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Looking at her in triumph.] Yes, and I won the victory.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [With a smile of scorn.] Do you still think that victory was worth the winning?
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Darkly.] No; Heaven knows you are right there.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
You need look for no victory worth the winning this time either.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Not when I am fighting to preserve a mother's power over my son!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
No; for it is only power over him that you want.
MRS. BORKMAN.
And you?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Warmly.] I want his affection—his soul—his whole heart!
MRS. BORKMAN.
[With an outburst.] That you shall never have in this world!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Looking at her.] You have seen to that?
MRS. BORKMAN. [Smiling.] Yes, I have taken that liberty. Could you not see that in his letters?
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Nods slowly.] Yes. I could see you—the whole of you—in his letters of late.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Gallingly.] I have made the best use of these eight years. I have had him under my own eye, you see.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Controlling herself.] What have you said to Erhart about me? Is it the sort of thing you can tell me?

MRS. BORKMAN.
Oh yes, I can tell you well enough.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Then please do.
MRS. BORKMAN.
I have only told him the truth.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Well?
MRS. BORKMAN. I have impressed upon him, every day of his life, that he must never forget that it is you we have to thank for being able to live as we do—for being able to live at all.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Is that all?
MRS. BORKMAN. Oh, that is the sort of thing that rankles; I feel that in my own heart.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
But that is very much what Erhart knew already.
MRS. BORKMAN. When he came home to me, he imagined that you did it all out of goodness of heart. [Looks malignly at her.] Now he does not believe that any longer, Ella.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Then what does he believe now?
MRS. BORKMAN. He believes what is the truth. I asked him how he accounted for the fact that Aunt Ella never came here to visit us——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Interrupting.] He knew my reasons already!
MRS. BORKMAN. He knows them better now. You had got him to believe that it was to spare me and—and him up there in gallery——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
And so it was.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Erhart does not believe that for a moment, now.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
What have you put in his head?
MRS. BORKMAN. He thinks, what is the truth, that you are ashamed of us—that you despise us. And do you pretend that you don't? Were you not once planning to take him quite away from me? Think, Ella; you cannot have forgotten.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [With a gesture of negation.] That was at the height of the scandal—when the case was before the courts. I have no such designs now.
MRS. BORKMAN. And it would not matter if you had. For in that case what would become of his mission? No, thank you. It is me that Erhart needs— not you. And therefore he is as good as dead to you—and you to him.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Coldly, with resolution.] We shall see. For now I shall remain out here.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Stares at her.] Here? In this house?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, here.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Here—with us? Remain all night?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I shall remain here all the rest of my days if need be.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Collecting herself.] Very well, Ella; the house is yours——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Oh, nonsense——
MRS. BORKMAN. Everything is yours. The chair I am sitting in is yours. The bed I lie and toss in at night belongs to you. The food we eat comes to us from you.
ELLA RENTHEIM. It can't be arranged otherwise, you know. Borkman can hold no property of his own; for some one would at once come and take it from him.
MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, I know. We must be content to live upon your pity and charity.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Coldly.] I cannot prevent you from looking at it in that light, Gunhild.
MRS. BORKMAN.
No, you cannot. When do you want us to move out?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Looking at her.] Move out?
MRS. BORKMAN. [In great excitement.] Yes; you don't imagine that I will go on living under the same roof with you! I tell you, I would rather go to the workhouse or tramp the roads!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Good. Then let me take Erhart with me——
MRS. BORKMAN.
Erhart? My own son? My child?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes; for then I would go straight home again.
MRS. BORKMAN. [After reflecting a moment, firmly.] Erhart himself shall choose between us.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Looking doubtfully and hesitatingly at her.] He choose? Dare you risk that, Gunhild?
MRS. BORKMAN. [With a hard laugh.] Dare I? Let my boy choose between his mother and you? Yes, indeed I dare!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Listening.] Is there some one coming? I thought I heard——

MRS. BORKMAN.

Then it must be Erhart.

[There is a sharp knock at the door leading in from the hall, which is immediately opened. MRS. WILTON enters, in evening dress, and with outer wraps. She is followed by THE MAID, who has not had time to announce her, and looks bewildered. The door remains half open. MRS. WILTON is a strikingly handsome, well-developed woman in the thirties. Broad, red, smiling lips, sparkling eyes. Luxuriant dark hair.

MRS. WILTON.

Good evening, my dearest Mrs. Borkman!

MRS. BORKMAN. [Rather drily.] Good evening, Mrs. Wilton. [To THE MAID, pointing toward the garden-room.] Take the lamp that is in there and light it.

[THE MAID takes the lamp and goes out with it.

MRS. WILTON. [Observing ELLA RENTHEIM.] Oh, I beg your pardon—you have a visitor.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Only my sister, who has just arrived from——

[ERHART BORKMAN flings the half-open door wide open and rushes in. He is a young man with bright cheerful eyes. He is well dressed; his moustache is beginning to grow.

ERHART.

[Radiant with joy; on the threshold.] What is this! Is Aunt Ella here? [Rushing up to her and seizing her hands.] Aunt, aunt! Is it possible? Are you here?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Throws her arms round his neck.] Erhart! My dear, dear boy! Why, how big you have grown! Oh, how good it is to see you again!

MRS. BORKMAN. [Sharply.] What does this mean, Erhart? Were you hiding out in the hallway?

MRS. WILTON.

[Quickly.] Erhart—Mr. Borkman came in with me.

MRS. BORKMAN. [Looking hard at him.] Indeed, Erhart! You don't come to your mother first?

ERHART. I had just to look in at Mrs. Wilton's for a moment—to call for little Frida.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Is that Miss Foldal with you too?

MRS. WILTON.

Yes, we have left her in the hall.

ERHART. [Addressing some one through the open door.] You can go right upstairs, Frida.

[Pause. ELLA RENTHEIM observes ERHART. He seems embarrassed and a little impatient; his face has assumed a nervous and colder expression.

[THE MAID brings the lighted lamp into the garden-room, goes out again

and closes the door behind her.
MRS. BORKMAN. [With forced politeness.] Well, Mrs. Wilton, if you will give us the pleasure of your company this evening, won't you——
MRS. WILTON. Many thanks, my dear lady, but I really can't. We have another invitation. We're going down to the Hinkels'.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Looking at her.] We? Whom do you mean by we?
MRS. WILTON. [Laughing.] Oh, I ought really to have said I. But I was commissioned by the ladies of the house to bring Mr. Borkman with me—if I happened to see him.
MRS. BORKMAN.
And you did happen to see him, it appears.
MRS. WILTON. Yes, fortunately. He was good enough to look in at my house— to call for Frida.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Drily.] But, Erhart, I did not know that you knew that family— those Hinkels?
ERHART.
[Irritated.] No, I don't exactly know them. [Adds rather impatiently.] You know better than anybody, mother, what people I know and don't know.
MRS. WILTON. Oh, it doesn't matter! They soon put you at your ease in that house! They are such cheerful, hospitable people—the house swarms with young ladies.
MRS. BORKMAN. [With emphasis.] If I know my son rightly, Mrs. Wilton, they are no fit company for him.
MRS. WILTON.
Why, good gracious, dear lady, he is young, too, you know!
MRS. BORKMAN.
Yes, fortunately he's young. He would need to be young.
ERHART.
[Concealing his impatience.] Well, well, well, mother, it's quite clear I can't got to the Hinkels' this evening. Of course I shall remain here with you and Aunt Ella.
MRS. BORKMAN.
I knew you would, my dear Erhart.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
No, Erhart, you must not stop at home on my account——
ERHART. Yes, indeed, my dear Aunt; I can't think of going. [Looking doubtfully at MRS. WILTON.] But how shall we manage? Can I get out of it? You have said "Yes" for me, haven't you?
MRS. WILTON. [Gaily.] What nonsense! Not get out of it! When I make my entrance into the festive halls—just imagine it!—deserted and forlorn—then I must simply say "No" for you.
ERHART. [Hesitatingly.] Well, if you really think I can get out of it——
MRS. WILTON. [Putting the matter lightly aside.] I am quite used to saying

both yes and no—on my own account. And you can't possibly think of leaving your aunt the moment she has arrived! For shame, Monsieur Erhart! Would that be behaving like a good son?

MRS. BORKMAN.

[Annoyed.] Son?

MRS. WILTON.

Well, adopted son then, Mrs. Borkman.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Yes, you may well add that.

MRS. WILTON. Oh, it seems to me we have often more cause to be grateful to a foster-mother than to our own mother.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Has that been your experience?

MRS. WILTON. I knew very little of my own mother, I am sorry to say. But if I had had a good foster-mother, perhaps I shouldn't have been so— so naughty, as people say I am. [Turning towards ERHART.] Well, then we stop peaceably at home like a good boy, and drink tea with mamma and auntie! [To the ladies.] Good-bye, good-bye Mrs. Borkman! Good-bye Miss Rentheim.

[The ladies bow silently. She goes toward the door.

ERHART.

[Following her.] Shan't I go a little bit of the way with you?

MRS. WILTON. [In the doorway, motioning him back.] You shan't go a step with me. I am quite accustomed to taking my walks alone. [Stops on the threshold, looks at him and nods.] But now beware, Mr. Borkman—I warn you!

ERHART.

What am I to beware of?

MRS. WILTON.

[Gaily.] Why, as I go down the road—deserted and forlorn, as I said before—I shall try if I can't cast a spell upon you.

ERHART.

[Laughing.] Oh, indeed! Are you going to try that again?

MRS. WILTON.

[Half seriously.] Yes, just you beware! As I go down the road, I will say in my own mind—right from the very centre of my will— I will say: "Mr. Erhart Borkman, take your hat at once!"

MRS. BORKMAN.

And you think he will take it?

MRS. WILTON. [Laughing.] Good heavens, yes, he'll snatch up his hat instantly. And then I will say: "Now put on your overcoat, like a good boy, Erhart Borkman! And your goloshes! Be sure you don't forget the goloshes! And then follow me! Do as I bid you, as I bid you, as I bid you!"

ERHART.

[With forced gaiety.] Oh, you may rely on that.

MRS. WILTON.

[Raising her forefinger.] As I bid you! As I bid you! Good-night!

[She laughs and nods to the ladies, and closes the door behind her.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Does she really play tricks of that sort?

ERHART. Oh, not at all. How can you think so! She only says it in fun. [Breaking off.] But don't let us talk about Mrs. Wilton. [He forces ELLA RENTHEIM to seat herself at the armchair beside the stove, then stands and looks at her.] To think of your having taken all this long journey, Aunt Ella! And in winter too!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I found I had to, Erhart.

ERHART.

Indeed? Why so?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I had to come to town after all, to consult the doctors.

ERHART.

Oh, I'm glad of that!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Smiling.] Are you glad of that?

ERHART.

I mean I am glad you made up your mind to it at last.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[On the sofa, coldly.] Are you ill, Ella?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Looking hardly at her.] You know quite well that I am ill.

MRS. BORKMAN.

I knew you were not strong, and hadn't been for years.

ERHART.

I told you before I left you that you ought to consult a doctor.

ELLA RENTHEIM. There is no one in my neighbourhood that I have any real confidence in. And, besides, I did not feel it so much at that time.

ERHART.

Are you worse, then, Aunt?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, my dear boy; I am worse now.

ERHART.

But there's nothing dangerous?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Oh, that depends how you look at it.

ERHART. [Emphatically.] Well, then, I tell you what it is, Aunt Ella; you mustn't think of going home again for the present.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

No, I am not thinking of it.
ERHART. You must remain in town; for here you can have your choice of all the best doctors.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
That was what I thought when I left home.
ERHART. And then you must be sure and find a really nice place to live—quiet, comfortable rooms.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I went this morning to the old ones, where I used to stay before.
ERHART.
Oh, well, you were comfortable enough there.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, but I shall not be staying there after all.
ERHART.
Indeed? Why not?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I changed my mind after coming out here.
ERHART.
[Surprised.] Really? Changed you mind?
MRS. BORKMAN. [Crocheting; without looking up.] Your aunt will live here, in her own house, Erhart.
ERHART. [Looking from one to the other alternately.] Here, with us? Is this true, Aunt?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, that is what I made up my mind to do.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[As before.] Everything here belongs to your aunt, you know.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I intend to remain here, Erhart—just now—for the present. I shall set up a little establishment of my own, over in the bailiff's wing.
ERHART. Ah, that's a good idea. There are plenty of rooms there. [With sudden vivacity.] But, by-the-bye, Aunt—aren't you very tired after your journey?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Oh yes, rather tired.
ERHART.
Well, then, I think you ought to go quite early to bed.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Looks at him smilingly.] I mean to.
ERHART. [Eagerly.] And then we could have a good long talk to-morrow—or some other day, of course—about this and that—about things in general—you and mother and I. Wouldn't that be much the best plan, Aunt Ella?
MRS. BORKMAN. [With an outburst, rising from the sofa.] Erhart, I can see you are going to leave me!

ERHART.
[Starts.] What do you mean by that?
MRS. BORKMAN.
You are going down to—to the Hinkels'?
ERHART.
[Involuntarily.] Oh, that! [Collecting himself.] Well, you wouldn't have me sit here and keep Aunt Ella up half the night? Remember, she's an invalid, mother.
MRS. BORKMAN.
You are going to the Hinkels', Erhart!
ERHART. [Impatiently.] Well, really, mother, I don't think I can well get out of it. What do you say, Aunt?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I should like you to feel quite free, Erhart.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Goes up to her menacingly.] You want to take him away from me!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Rising.] Yes, if only I could, Gunhild!
[Music is heard from above.
ERHART. [Writhing as if in pain.] Oh, I can't endure this! [Looking round.] What have I done with my hat? [To ELLA RENTHEIM.] Do you know the air that she is playing up there?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
No. What is it?
ERHART. It's the *Danse Macabre*—the Dance of Death! Don't you know the Dance of Death, Aunt?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Smiling sadly.] Not yet, Erhart.
ERHART.
[To MRS. BORKMAN.] Mother—I beg and implore you—let me go!
MRS. BORKMAN. [Looks hardly at him.] Away from your mother? So that is what you want to do?
ERHART.
Of course I'll come out again—to-morrow perhaps.
MRS. BORKMAN. [With passionate emotion.] You want to go away from me! To be with those strange people! With—with—no, I will not even think of it!
ERHART. There are bright lights down there, and young, happy faces; and there's music there, mother!
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Pointing upwards.] There is music here, too, Erhart.
ERHART.
Yes, it's just that music that drives me out of the house.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Do you grudge your father a moment of self-forgetfulness?

ERHART. No, I don't. I'm very, very glad that he should have it—if only *I* don't have to listen.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Looking solemnly at him.] Be strong, Erhart! Be strong, my son! Do not forget that you have your great mission.
ERHART.
Oh, mother—do spare me these phrases! I wasn't born to be a "missionary."—Good-night, aunt dear! Good-night, mother.
[He goes hastily out through the hall.
MRS. BORKMAN. [After a short silence.] It has not taken you long to recapture him, Ella, after all.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I wish I could believe it.
MRS. BORKMAN.
But you shall see you won't be allowed to keep him long.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Allowed? By you, do you mean?
MRS. BORKMAN.
By me or—by her, the other one——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Then rather she than you.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Nodding slowly.] That I understand. I say the same. Rather she than you.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Whatever should become of him in the end——
MRS. BORKMAN.
It wouldn't greatly matter, I should say.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Taking her outdoor things upon her arm.] For the first time in our lives, we twin sisters are of one mind. Good-night, Gunhild.
[She goes out by the hall. The music sounds louder from above.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Stands still for a moment, starts, shrinks together, and whispers involuntarily.] The wolf is whining again—the sick wolf. [She stands still for a moment, then flings herself down on the floor, writhing in agony and whispering:] Erhart! Erhart!—be true to me! Oh, come home and help your mother! For I can bear this life no longer!

ACT SECOND

The great gallery on the first floor of the Rentheim House. The walls are covered with old tapestries, representing hunting-scenes, shepherds and shepherdesses, all in faded colours. A folding-door to the left, and further forward a piano. In the left-hand corner, at the back, a door, cut in the tapestry, and covered with tapestry, without any frame. Against the middle of the right wall, a large writing-table of carved oak, with many books and papers. Further forward on the same side, a sofa with a table and chairs in

front of it. The furniture is all of a stiff Empire style. Lighted lamps on both tables.

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN stands with his hands behind his back, beside the piano, listening to FRIDA FOLDAL, who is playing the last bars of the "Danse Macabre."

BORKMAN is of middle height, a well-knit, powerfully-built man, well on in the sixties. His appearance is distinguished, his profile finely cut, his eyes piercing, his hair and beard curly and greyish-white. He is dressed in a slightly old-fashioned black coat, and wears a white necktie. FRIDA FOLDAL is a pretty, pale girl of fifteen, with a somewhat weary and overstrained expression. She is cheaply dressed in light colours.

BORKMAN.

Can you guess where I first heard tones like these?

FRIDA.

[Looking up at him.] No, Mr. Borkman.

BORKMAN.

It was down in the mines.

FRIDA.

[Not understanding.] Indeed? Down in the mines?

BORKMAN.

I am a miner's son, you know. Or perhaps you did not know?

FRIDA.

No, Mr. Borkman.

BORKMAN. A miner's son. And my father used sometimes to take me with him into the mines. The metal sings down there.

FRIDA.

Really? Sings?

BORKMAN. [Nodding.] When it is loosened. The hammer-strokes that loosen it are the midnight bell clanging to set it free; and that is why the metal sings—in its own way—for gladness.

FRIDA.

Why does it do that, Mr. Borkman?

BORKMAN.

It wants to come up into the light of day and serve mankind.

[He paces up and down the gallery, always with his hands behind his back.

FRIDA.

[Sits waiting a little, then looks at her watch and rises.]

I beg your pardon, Mr. Borkman; but I am afraid I must go.

BORKMAN.

[Stopping before her.] Are you going already?

FRIDA. [Putting her music in its case.] I really must. [Visibly embarrassed.] I have an engagement this evening.

BORKMAN.

For a party?

FRIDA.
Yes.
BORKMAN.
And you are to play before the company?
FRIDA.
[Biting her lip.] No; at least I am only to play for dancing.
BORKMAN.
Only for dancing?
FRIDA.
Yes; there is to be a dance after supper.
BORKMAN.
[Stands and looks at her.] Do you like playing dance music?
At parties, I mean?
FRIDA. [Putting on her outdoor things.] Yes, when I can get an engagement. I can always earn a little in that way.
BORKMAN. [With interest.] Is that the principal thing in your mind as you sit playing for the dancers?
FRIDA. No; I'm generally thinking how hard it is that I mayn't join in the dance myself.
BORKMAN. [Nodding.] That is just what I wanted to know. [Moving restlessly about the room.] Yes, yes, yes. That you must not join in the dance, that is the hardest thing of all. [Stopping.] But there is one thing that should make up to you for that, Frida.
FRIDA.
[Looking inquiringly at him.] What is that, Mr. Borkman?
BORKMAN. The knowledge that you have ten times more music in you than all the dancers together.
FRIDA.
[Smiling evasively.] Oh, that's not at all so certain.
BORKMAN. [Holding up his fore-finger warningly.] You must never be so mad as to have doubts of yourself!
FRIDA.
But since no one knows it——
BORKMAN. So long as you know it yourself, that is enough. Where is it you are going to play this evening?
FRIDA.
Over at the Hinkel's.
BORKMAN.
[With a swift, keen glance at her.] Hinkel's, you say!
FRIDA.
Yes.
BORKMAN. [With a cutting smile.] Does that man give parties? Can he get people to visit him?
FRIDA.
Yes, they have a great many people about them, Mrs. Wilton says.

BORKMAN.
[Vehemently.] But what sort of people? Can you tell me that?
FRIDA.
[A little nervously.] No, I really don't know. Yes, by-the-bye, I know that young Mr. Borkman is to be there this evening.
BORKMAN.
[Taken aback.] Erhart? My son?
FRIDA.
Yes, he is going there.
BORKMAN.
How do you know that?
FRIDA.
He said so himself—an hour ago.
BORKMAN.
Is he out here to-day?
FRIDA.
Yes, he has been at Mrs. Wilton's all the afternoon.
BORKMAN. [Inquiringly.] Do you know if he called here too? I mean, did he see any one downstairs?
FRIDA.
Yes, he looked in to see Mrs. Borkman.
BORKMAN.
[Bitterly.] Aha—I might have known it.
FRIDA.
There was a strange lady calling upon her, I think.
BORKMAN. Indeed? Was there? Oh yes, I suppose people do come now and then to see Mrs. Borkman.
FRIDA. If I meet young Mr. Borkman this evening, shall I ask him to come up and see you too?
BORKMAN. [Harshly.] You shall do nothing of the sort! I won't have it on any account. The people who want to see me can come of their own accord.
FRIDA.
Oh, very well; I shan't say anything then. Good-night, Mr. Borkman.
BORKMAN.
[Pacing up and down and growling.] Good-night.
FRIDA. Do you mind if I run down by the winding stair? It's the shortest way.
BORKMAN. Oh, by all means; take whatever stair you please, so far as I am concerned. Good-night to you!
FRIDA.
Good-night, Mr. Borkman.
[She goes out by the little tapestry door in the back on the left.
[BORKMAN, lost in thought, goes up to the piano, and is about to close it,

but changes his mind. Looks round the great empty room, and sets to pacing up and down it from the corner at the back on the right—pacing backward and forward uneasily and incessantly. At last he goes up to the writing-table, listens in the direction of the folding door, hastily snatches up a hand-glass, looks at himself in it, and straightens his necktie.

[A knock at the folding door. BORKMAN hears it, looks rapidly towards the door, but says nothing.

[In a little there comes another knock, this time louder.

BORKMAN. [Standing beside the writing-table with his left hand resting upon it, and his right thrust in the breast of his coat.] Come in!

[VILHELM FOLDAL comes softly into the room. He is a bent and worn man with mild blue eyes and long, thin grey hair straggling down over his coat collar. He has a portfolio under his arm, a soft felt hat, and large horn spectacles, which he pushes up over his forehead.

BORKMAN. [Changes his attitude and looks at FOLDAL with a half disappointed, half pleased expression.] Oh, is it only you?

FOLDAL.

Good evening, John Gabriel. Yes, you see it is me.

BORKMAN.

[With a stern glance.] I must say you are rather a late visitor.

FOLDAL. Well, you know, it's a good bit of a way, especially when you have to trudge it on foot.

BORKMAN. But why do you always walk, Vilhelm? The tramway passes your door.

FOLDAL.

It's better for you to walk—and then you always save twopence.

Well, has Frida been playing to you lately?

BORKMAN.

She has just this moment gone. Did you not meet her outside?

FOLDAL. No, I have seen nothing of her for a long time; not since she went to live with this Mrs. Wilton.

BORKMAN.

[Seating himself on the sofa and waving his hand toward a chair.]

You may sit down, Vilhelm.

FOLDAL. [Seating himself on the edge of a chair.] Many thanks. [Looks mournfully at him.] You can't think how lonely I feel since Frida left home.

BORKMAN.

Oh, come—you have plenty left.

FOLDAL. Yes, God knows I have—five of them. But Frida was the only one who at all understood me. [Shaking his head sadly.] The others don't understand me a bit.

BORKMAN. [Gloomily, gazing straight before him, and drumming on the table with his fingers.] No, that's just it. That is the curse we exceptional, chosen people have to bear. The common herd— the average man and woman—they do not understand us, Vilhelm.

FOLDAL. [With resignation.] If it were only the lack of understanding—with a little patience, one could manage to wait for that awhile yet. [His voice choked with tears.] But there is something still bitterer.

BORKMAN.

[Vehemently.] There is nothing bitterer than that.

FOLDAL. Yes, there is, John Gabriel. I have gone through a domestic scene to-night—just before I started.

BORKMAN.

Indeed? What about?

FOLDAL.

[With an outburst.] My people at home—they despise me.

BORKMAN.

[Indignantly.] Despise——?

FOLDAL. [Wiping his eyes.] I have long known it; but to-day it came out unmistakably.

BORKMAN. [After a short silence.] You made an unwise choice, I fear, when you married.

FOLDAL.

I had practically no choice in the matter. And, you see, one feels a need for companionship as one begins to get on in years. And so crushed as I then was—so utterly broken down——

BORKMAN.

[Jumping up in anger.] Is this meant for me? A reproach——!

FOLDAL.

[Alarmed.] No, no, for Heaven's sake, John Gabriel——!

BORKMAN. Yes, you are thinking of the disaster to the bank, I can see you are.

FOLDAL.

[Soothingly.] But I don't blame you for that! Heaven forbid!

BORKMAN. [Growling, resumes his seat.] Well, that is a good thing, at any rate.

FOLDAL. Besides, you mustn't think it is my wife that I complain of. It is true she has not much polish, poor thing; but she is a good sort of woman all the same. No, it's the children.

BORKMAN.

I thought as much.

FOLDAL. For the children—well, they have more culture and therefore they expect more of life.

BORKMAN. [Looking at him sympathetically.] And so your children despise you, Vilhelm?

FOLDAL. [Shrugging his shoulders.] I haven't made much of a career, you see—there is no denying that.

BORKMAN. [Moving nearer to him, and laying his hand upon his arm.] Do they not know, then, that in your young days you wrote a tragedy?

FOLDAL. Yes, of course they know that. But it doesn't seem to make much

impression on them.
BORKMAN. Then they don't understand these things. For your tragedy is good. I am firmly convinced of that.
FOLDAL. [Brightening up.] Yes, don't you think there are some good things in it, John Gabriel? Good God, if I could only manage to get it placed——! [Opens his portfolio, and begins eagerly turning over the contents.] Look here! Just let me show you one or two alterations I have made.
BORKMAN.
Have you it with you?
FOLDAL. Yes, I thought I would bring it. It's so long now since I have read it to you. And I thought perhaps it might amuse you to hear an act or two.
BORKMAN. [Rising, with a negative gesture.] No, no, we will keep that for another time.
FOLDAL.
Well, well, as you please.
[BORKMAN paces up and down the room. FOLDAL puts the manuscript up again.
BORKMAN. [Stopping in front of him.] You are quite right in what you said just now—you have not made any career. But I promise you this, Vilhelm, that when once the hour of my restoration strikes——
FOLDAL.
[Making a movement to rise.] Oh, thanks, thanks!
BORKMAN. [Waving his hand.] No, please be seated. [With rising excitement.] When the hour of my restoration strikes—when they see that they cannot get on without me—when they come to me, here in the gallery, and crawl to my feet, and beseech me to take the reins of the bank again——! The new bank, that they have founded and can't carry on—— [Placing himself beside the writing-table in the same attitude as before, and striking his breast.] Here I shall stand, and receive them! And it shall be known far and wide, all the country over, what conditions John Gabriel Borkman imposes before he will—— [Stopping suddenly and staring at FOLDAL.] You're looking so doubtfully at me! Perhaps you do not believe that they will come? That they must, must, must come to me some day? Do you not believe it?
FOLDAL.
Yes, Heaven knows I do, John Gabriel.
BORKMAN. [Seating himself again on the sofa.] I firmly believe it. I am immovably convinced—I know that they will come. If I had not been certain of that I would have put a bullet through my head long ago.
FOLDAL.
[Anxiously.] Oh no, for Heaven's sake——!
BORKMAN.
[Exultantly.] But they will come! They will come sure enough! You shall see! I expect them any day, any moment. And you see, I hold myself in readiness to receive them.

FOLDAL.

[With a sigh.] If only they would come quickly.

BORKMAN.

[Restlessly.] Yes, time flies: the years slip away; life——
Ah, no—I dare not think of it! [Looking at him.] Do you know what I sometimes feel like?

FOLDAL.

What?

BORKMAN.

I feel like a Napoleon who has been maimed in his first battle.

FOLDAL.

[Placing his hand upon his portfolio.] I have that feeling too.

BORKMAN.

Oh, well, that is on a smaller scale, of course.

FOLDAL.

[Quietly.] My little world of poetry is very precious to me, John Gabriel.

BORKMAN. [Vehemently.] Yes, but think of me, who could have created millions! All the mines I should have controlled! New veins innumerable! And the water-falls! And the quarries! And the trade routes, and the steamship-lines all the wide world over! I would have organised it all—I alone!

FOLDAL. Yes, I know, I know. There was nothing in the world you would have shrunk from.

BORKMAN. [Clenching his hands together.] And now I have to sit here, like a wounded eagle, and look on while others pass me in the race, and take everything away from me, piece by piece!

FOLDAL.

That is my fate too.

BORKMAN. [Not noticing him.] Only to think of it; so near to the goal as I was! If I had only had another week to look about me! All the deposits would have been covered. All the securities I had dealt with so daringly should have been in their places again as before. Vast companies were within a hair's-breadth of being floated. Not a soul should have lost a half-penny.

FOLDAL.

Yes, yes; you were on the very verge of success.

BORKMAN. [With suppressed fury.] And then treachery overtook me! Just at the critical moment! [Looking at him.] Do you know what I hold to be the most infamous crime a man can be guilty of?

FOLDAL.

No, tell me.

BORKMAN. It is not murder. It is not robbery or house-breaking. It is not even perjury. For all these things people do to those they hate, or who are indifferent to them, and do not matter.

FOLDAL.

What is the worst of all then, John Gabriel?

BORKMAN. [With emphasis.] The most infamous of crimes is a friend's betrayal of his friend's confidence.

FOLDAL.

[Somewhat doubtfully.] Yes, but you know——

BORKMAN. [Firing up.] What are you going to say? I see it in your face. But it is of no use. The people who had their securities in the bank should have got them all back again—every farthing. No; I tell you the most infamous crime a man can commit is to misuse a friend's letters; to publish to all the world what has been confided to him alone, in the closest secrecy, like a whisper in an empty, dark, double-locked room. The man who can do such things is infected and poisoned in every fibre with the morals of the higher rascality. And such a friend was mine—and it was he who crushed me.

FOLDAL.

I can guess whom you mean.

BORKMAN. There was not a nook or cranny of my life that I hesitated to lay open to him. And then, when the moment came, he turned against me the weapons I myself had placed in his hands.

FOLDAL. I have never been able to understand why he—— Of course, there were whispers of all sorts at the time.

BORKMAN.

What were the whispers? Tell me. You see I know nothing. For I had to go straight into—into isolation. What did people whisper, Vilhelm?

FOLDAL.

You were to have gone into the Cabinet, they said.

BORKMAN.

I was offered a portfolio, but I refused it.

FOLDAL.

Then it wasn't there you stood in his way?

BORKMAN.

Oh, no; that was not the reason he betrayed me.

FOLDAL.

Then I really can't understand——

BORKMAN.

I may as well tell you, Vilhelm——

FOLDAL.

Well?

BORKMAN.

There was—in fact, there was a woman in the case.

FOLDAL.

A woman in the case? Well but, John Gabriel——

BORKMAN. [Interrupting.] Well, well—let us say no more of these stupid old stories. After all, neither of us got into the Cabinet, neither he nor I.

FOLDAL.
But he rose high in the world.
BORKMAN.
And I fell into the abyss.
FOLDAL.
Oh, it's a terrible tragedy——
BORKMAN.
[Nodding to him.] Almost as terrible as yours, I fancy, when I come to think of it.
FOLDAL.
[Naively.] Yes, at least as terrible.
BORKMAN. [Laughing quietly.] But looked at from another point of view, it is really a sort of comedy as well.
FOLDAL.
A comedy? The story of your life?
BORKMAN. Yes. it seems to be taking a turn in that direction. For let me tell you——
FOLDAL.
What?
BORKMAN.
You say you did not meet Frida as you came in?
FOLDAL.
No.
BORKMAN. At this moment, as we sit here, she is playing waltzes for the guests of the man who betrayed and ruined me.
FOLDAL.
I hadn't the least idea of that.
BORKMAN. Yes, she took her music, and went straight from me to—to the great house.
FOLDAL.
[Apologetically.] Well, you see, poor child——
BORKMAN.
And can you guess for whom she is playing—among the rest?
FOLDAL.
No.
BORKMAN.
For my son.
FOLDAL.
What?
BORKMAN. What do you think of that, Vilhelm? My son is down there in the whirl of the dance this evening. Am I not right in calling it a comedy?
FOLDAL.
But in that case you may be sure he knows nothing about it.
BORKMAN.
What does he know?

FOLDAL.

You may be sure he doesn't know how he—that man——

BORKMAN.

Do not shrink from his name. I can quite well bear it now.

FOLDAL.

I'm certain your son doesn't know the circumstances, John Gabriel.

BORKMAN. [Gloomily, sitting and beating the table.] Yes, he knows, as surely as I am sitting here.

FOLDAL.

Then how can he possibly be a guest in that house?

BORKMAN. [Shaking his head.] My son probably does not see things with my eyes. I'll take my oath he is on my enemies' side! No doubt he thinks, as they do, that Hinkel only did his confounded duty when he went and betrayed me.

FOLDAL. But, my dear friend, who can have got him to see things in that light?

BORKMAN. Who? Do you forget who has brought him up? First his aunt, from the time he was six or seven years old; and now, of late years, his mother!

FOLDAL.

I believe you are doing them an injustice.

BORKMAN. [Firing up.] I never do any one injustice! Both of them have gone and poisoned his mind against me, I tell you!

FOLDAL.

[Soothingly.] Well, well, well, I suppose they have.

BORKMAN. [Indignantly.] Oh these women! They wreck and ruin life for us! Play the devil with our whole destiny—our triumphal progress.

FOLDAL.

Not all of them!

BORKMAN. Indeed? Can you tell me of a single one that is good for anything?

FOLDAL. No, that is the trouble. The few that I know are good for nothing.

BORKMAN.

[With a snort of scorn.] Well then, what is the good of it?
What is the good of such women existing—if you never know them?

FOLDAL.

[Warmly.] Yes, John Gabriel, there is good in it, I assure you.
It is such a blessed, beneficial thought that here or there in the
world, somewhere, far away—the true woman exists after all.

BORKMAN. [Moving impatiently on the sofa.] Oh, do spare me that poetical nonsense.

FOLDAL. [Looks at him, deeply wounded.] Do you call my holiest faith poetical nonsense?

BORKMAN. [Harshly.] Yes I do! That is what has always prevented you from getting on in the world. If you would get all that out of your head, I

could still help you on in life—help you to rise.
FOLDAL.
[Boiling inwardly.] Oh, you can't do that.
BORKMAN.
I can when once I come into power again.
FOLDAL.
That won't be for many a day.
BORKMAN.
[Vehemently.] Perhaps you think that day will never come? Answer me!
FOLDAL.
I don't know what to answer.
BORKMAN. [Rising, cold and dignified, and waving his hand towards the door.] Then I no longer have any use for you.
FOLDAL.
[Starting up.] No use——!
BORKMAN.
Since you do not believe that the tide will turn for me——
FOLDAL. How can I believe in the teeth of all reason? You would have to be legally rehabilitated——
BORKMAN.
Go on! go on!
FOLDAL. It's true I never passed my examination; but I have read enough law to know that——
BORKMAN.
[Quickly.] It is impossible, you mean?
FOLDAL.
There is no precedent for such a thing.
BORKMAN.
Exceptional men are above precedents.
FOLDAL.
The law knows nothing of such distinctions.
BORKMAN.
[Harshly and decisively.] You are no poet, Vilhelm.
FOLDAL. [Unconsciously folding his hands.] Do you say that in sober earnest?
BORKMAN. [Dismissing the subject, without answering.] We are only wasting each other's time. You had better not come here again.
FOLDAL.
Then you really want me to leave you?
BORKMAN.
[Without looking at him.] I have no longer any use for you.
FOLDAL.
[Softly, taking his portfolio.] No, no, no; I daresay not.
BORKMAN.

Here you have been lying to me all the time.
FOLDAL.
[Shaking his head.] Never lying, John Gabriel.
BORKMAN. Have you not sat here feeding me with hope, and trust, and confidence—that was all a lie?
FOLDAL. It wasn't a lie so long as you believed in my vocation. So long as you believed in me, I believed in you.
BORKMAN. Then we have been all the time deceiving each other. And perhaps deceiving ourselves—both of us.
FOLDAL.
But isn't that just the essence of friendship, John Gabriel?
BORKMAN. [Smiling bitterly.] Yes, you are right there. Friendship means—deception. I have learnt that once before.
FOLDAL. [Looking at him.] I have no poetic vocation! And you could actually say it to me so bluntly.
BORKMAN. [In a gentler tone.] Well, you know, I don't pretend to know much about these matters.
FOLDAL.
Perhaps you know more than you think.
BORKMAN. I?
FOLDAL. [Softly.] Yes, you. For I myself have had my doubts, now and then, I may tell you. The horrible doubt that I may have bungled my life for the sake of a delusion.
BORKMAN. If you have no faith in yourself, you are on the downward path indeed.
FOLDAL. That was why I found such comfort in coming here to lean upon your faith in me. [Taking his hat.] But now you have become a stranger to me.
BORKMAN.
And you to me.
FOLDAL.
Good night, John Gabriel.
BORKMAN.
Good night, Vilhelm.
[Foldal goes out to the left.
[BORKMAN stands for a moment gazing at the closed door; makes a movement as though to call FOLDAL back, but changes his mind, and begins to pace the floor with his hands behind his back. Then he stops at the table beside the sofa and puts out the lamp. The room becomes half dark. After a short pause, there comes a knock at the tapestry door.
BORKMAN.
[At the table, starts, turns, and asks in a loud voice:] Who is that knocking?
[No answer, another knock.
BORKMAN.

[Without moving.] Who is it? Come in!

[ELLA RENTHEIM, with a lighted candle in her hand, appears in the doorway. She wears her black dress, as before, with her cloak thrown loosely round her shoulders.

BORKMAN.

[Staring at her.] Who are you? What do you want with me?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Closes the door and advances.] It is I, Borkman.

[She puts down the candle on the piano and remains standing beside it.

BORKMAN. [Stands as though thunderstruck, stares fixedly at her, and says in a half-whisper.] Is it—is it Ella? Is it Ella Rentheim?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, it's "your" Ella, as you used to call me in the old days; many, many years ago.

BORKMAN.

[As before.] Yes, it is you Ella, I can see you now.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Can you recognise me?

BORKMAN.

Yes, now I begin to——

ELLA RENTHEIM.

The years have told on me, and brought winter with them, Borkman. Do you not think so?

BORKMAN. [In a forced voice.] You are a good deal changed—just at first glance.

ELLA RENTHEIM. There are no dark curls on my neck now—the curls you once loved to twist round your fingers.

BORKMAN. [Quickly.] True! I can see now, Ella, you have done your hair differently.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [With a sad smile.] Precisely; it is the way I do my hair that makes the difference.

BORKMAN. [Changing the subject.] I had no idea that you were in this part of the world.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I have only just arrived.

BORKMAN.

Why have you come all this way now, in winter?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

That you shall hear.

BORKMAN.

Is it me you have come to see?

ELLA RENTHEIM. You among others. But if I am to tell you my errand, I must begin far back.

BORKMAN.

You look tired.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, I am tired.
BORKMAN.
Won't you sit down? There on the sofa.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, thank you; I need rest.
[She crosses to the right and seats herself in the furthest forward corner of the sofa. BORKMAN stands beside the table with his hands behind his back looking at her. A short silence.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
It seems an endless time since we two met, Borkman, face to face.
BORKMAN. [Gloomily.] It is a long, long time. And terrible things have passed since then.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
A whole lifetime has passed—a wasted lifetime.
BORKMAN.
[Looking keenly at her.] Wasted!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, I say wasted—for both of us.
BORKMAN. [In a cold business tone.] I cannot regard my life as wasted yet.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
And what about mine?
BORKMAN.
There you have yourself to blame, Ella.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[With a start.] And you can say that?
BORKMAN.
You could quite well have been happy without me.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Do you believe that?
BORKMAN.
If you had made up your mind to.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Bitterly.] Oh, yes, I know well enough there was some one else ready to marry me.
BORKMAN.
But you rejected him.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, I did.
BORKMAN.
Time after time you rejected him. Year after year——
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Scornfully.] Year after year I rejected happiness, I suppose you think?
BORKMAN. You might perfectly well have been happy with him. And then I should have been saved.
ELLA RENTHEIM.

You?

BORKMAN.

Yes, you would have saved me, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

How do you mean?

BORKMAN. He thought I was at the bottom of your obstinacy—of your perpetual refusals. And then he took his revenge. It was so easy for him; he had all my frank, confiding letters in his keeping. He made his own use of them; and then it was all over with me—for the time, that is to say. So you see it is all your doing, Ella!

ELLA RENTHEIM. Oh indeed, Borkman. If we look into the matter, it appears that it is I who owe you reparation.

BORKMAN. It depends how you look at it. I know quite well all that you have done for us. You bought in this house, and the whole property, at the auction. You placed the house entirely at my disposal—and your sister too. You took charge of Erhart, and cared for him in every way——

ELLA RENTHEIM.

As long as I was allowed to——

BORKMAN. By your sister, you mean. I have never mixed myself up in these domestic affairs. As I was saying, I know all the sacrifices you have made for me and for your sister. But you were in a position to do so, Ella; and you must not forget that it was I who placed you in that position.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Indignantly.] There you make a great mistake, Borkman! It was the love of my inmost heart for Erhart—and for you too—that made me do it!

BORKMAN. [Interrupting.] My dear Ella, do not let us get upon questions of sentiment and that sort of thing. I mean, of course, that if you acted generously, it was I that put it in your power to do so.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Smiling.] H'm! In my power——

BORKMAN. [Warmly.] Yes, put it in your power, I say! On the eve of the great decisive battle—when I could not afford to spare either kith or kin—when I had to grasp at—when I did grasp at the millions that were entrusted to me—then I spared all that was yours, every farthing, although I could have taken it, and made use of it, as I did of all the rest!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Coldly and quietly.] That is quite true, Borkman.

BORKMAN. Yes it is. And that was why, when they came and took me, they found all your securities untouched in the strong-room of the bank.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Looking at him.] I have often and often wondered what was your real reason for sparing all my property? That, and that alone.

BORKMAN.

My reason?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, your reason. Tell me.

BORKMAN. [Harshly and scornfully.] Perhaps you think it was that I might have something to fall back upon, if things went wrong?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Oh no, I am sure you did not think of that in those days.
BORKMAN.
Never! I was so absolutely certain of victory.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Well then, why was it that——?
BORKMAN. [Shrugging his shoulders.] Upon my soul, Ella, it is not so easy to remember one's motives of twenty years ago. I only know that when I used to grapple, silently and alone, with all the great projects I had in my mind, I had something like the feeling of a man who is starting on a balloon voyage. All through my sleepless nights I was inflating my giant balloon, and preparing to soar away into perilous, unknown regions.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Smiling.] You, who never had the least doubt of victory?
BORKMAN. [Impatiently.] Men are made so, Ella. They both doubt and believe at the same time. [Looking straight before him.] And I suppose that was why I would not take you and yours with me in the balloon.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Eagerly.] Why, I ask you? Tell me why!
BORKMAN. [Without looking at her.] One shrinks from risking what one holds dearest on such a voyage.
ELLA RENTHEIM. You had risked what was dearest to you on that voyage. Your whole future life——
BORKMAN.
Life is not always what one holds dearest.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Breathlessly.] Was that how you felt at that time?
BORKMAN.
I fancy it was.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I was the dearest thing in the world to you?
BORKMAN.
I seem to remember something of the sort.
ELLA RENTHEIM. And yet years had passed since you had deserted me—and married— married another!
BORKMAN.
Deserted you, you say? You must know very well that it was higher motives—well then, other motives that compelled me. Without his support I could not have done anything.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Controlling herself.] So you deserted me from—higher motives.
BORKMAN. I could not get on without his help. And he made you the price of helping me.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

And you paid the price. Paid it in full—without haggling.

BORKMAN.

I had no choice. I had to conquer or fall.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [In a trembling voice, looking at him.] Can what you tell me be true—that I was then the dearest thing in the world to you?

BORKMAN.

Both then and afterwards—long, long, after.

ELLA RENTHEIM. But you bartered me away none the less; drove a bargain with another man for your love. Sold my love for a—for a directorship.

BORKMAN. [Gloomily and bowed down.] I was driven by inexorable necessity, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Rises from the sofa, quivering with passion.] Criminal!

BORKMAN.

[Starts, but controls himself.] I have heard that word before.

ELLA RENTHEIM. Oh, don't imagine I'm thinking of anything you may have done against the law of the land! The use you made of all those vouchers and securities, or whatever you call them—do you think I care a straw about that! If I could have stood at your side when the crash came——

BORKMAN.

[Eagerly.] What then, Ella?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Trust me, I should have borne it all so gladly along with you.

The shame, the ruin—I would have helped you to bear it all—all!

BORKMAN.

Would you have had the will—the strength?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Both the will and the strength. For then I did not know of your great, your terrible crime.

BORKMAN.

What crime? What are you speaking of?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I am speaking of that crime for which there is no forgiveness.

BORKMAN.

[Staring at her.] You must be out of your mind.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Approaching him.] You are a murderer! You have committed the one mortal sin!

BORKMAN.

[Falling back towards the piano.] You are raving, Ella!

ELLA RENTHEIM. You have killed the love-life in me. [Still nearer him.] Do you understand what that means? The Bible speaks of a mysterious sin for which there is no forgiveness. I have never understood what it could be; but now I understand. The great, unpardonable sin is to murder the love-life in a human soul.

BORKMAN.

And you say I have done that?

ELLA RENTHEIM. You have done that. I have never rightly understood until this evening what had really happened to me. That you deserted me and turned to Gunhild instead—I took that to be mere common fickleness on your part, and the result of heartless scheming on hers. I almost think I despised you a little, in spite of everything. But now I see it! You deserted the woman you loved! Me, me, me! What you held dearest in the world you were ready to barter away for gain. That is the double murder you have committed! The murder of your own soul and of mine!

BORKMAN. [With cold self-control.] How well I recognise your passionate, ungovernable spirit, Ella. No doubt it is natural enough that you should look at the thing in this light. Of course, you are a woman, and therefore it would seem that your own heart is the one thing you know or care about in this world.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, yes it is.

BORKMAN.

Your own heart is the only thing that exists for you.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

The only thing! The only thing! You are right there.

BORKMAN. But you must remember that I am a man. As a woman, you were the dearest thing in the world to me. But if the worst comes to the worst, one woman can always take the place of another.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Looks at him with a smile.] Was that your experience when you had made Gunhild your wife?

BORKMAN. No. But the great aims I had in life helped me to bear even that. I wanted to have at my command all the sources of power in this country. All the wealth that lay hidden in the soil, and the rocks, and the forests, and the sea— I wanted to gather it all into my hands to make myself master of it all, and so to promote the well-being of many, many thousands.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Lost in recollection.] I know it. Think of all the evenings we spent in talking over your projects.

BORKMAN.

Yes, I could talk to you, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM. I jested with your plans, and asked whether you wanted to awaken all the sleeping spirits of the mine.

BORKMAN. [Nodding.] I remember that phrase. [Slowly.] All the sleeping spirits of the mine.

ELLA RENTHEIM. But you did not take it as a jest. You said: "Yes, yes, Ella, that is just what I want to do."

BORKMAN.

And so it was. If only I could get my foot in the stirrup——

And that depended on that one man. He could and would secure me

the control of the bank—if I on my side——

ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, just so! If you on your side would renounce the woman you loved—and who loved you beyond words in return.
BORKMAN. I knew his consuming passion for you. I knew that on no other condition would he——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
And so you struck the bargain.
BORKMAN. [Vehemently.] Yes, I did, Ella! For the love of power is uncontrollable in me, you see! So I struck the bargain; I had to. And he helped me half-way up towards the beckoning heights that I was bent on reaching. And I mounted and mounted; year by year I mounted——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
And I was as though wiped out of your life.
BORKMAN. And after all he hurled me into the abyss again. On account of you, Ella.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [After a short thoughtful silence.] Borkman, does it not seem to you as if there had been a sort of curse on our whole relation?
BORKMAN.
[Looking at her.] A curse?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes. Don't you think so?
BORKMAN.
[Uneasily.] Yes. But why is it? [With an outburst.] Oh Ella,
I begin to wonder which is in the right—you or I!
ELLA RENTHEIM. It is you who have sinned. You have done to death all the gladness of my life in me.
BORKMAN.
[Anxiously.] Do not say that, Ella!
ELLA RENTHEIM. All a woman's gladness at any rate. From the day when your image began to dwindle in my mind, I have lived my life as though under an eclipse. During all these years it has grown harder and harder for me—and at last utterly impossible—to love any living creature. Human beings, animals, plants: I shrank from all—from all but one——
BORKMAN.
What one?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Erhart, of course.
BORKMAN.
Erhart?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Erhart—your son, Borkman.
BORKMAN.
Has he really been so close to your heart?
ELLA RENTHEIM. Why else should I have taken him to me, and kept him as long as ever I could? Why?
BORKMAN.

I thought it was out of pity, like all the rest that you did.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [In strong inward emotion.] Pity! Ha, ha! I have never known pity, since you deserted me. I was incapable of feeling it. If a poor starved child came into my kitchen, shivering, and crying, and begging for a morsel of food, I let the servants look to it. I never felt any desire to take the child to myself, to warm it at my own hearth, to have the pleasure of seeing it eat and be satisfied. And yet I was not like that when I was young; that I remember clearly! It is you that have created an empty, barren desert within me—and without me too!

BORKMAN.

Except only for Erhart.

ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, except for your son. But I am hardened to every other living thing. You have cheated me of a mother's joy and happiness in life—and of a mother's sorrows and tears as well. And perhaps that is the heaviest part of the loss to me.

BORKMAN.

Do you say that, Ella?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Who knows? It may be that a mother's sorrows and tears were what I needed most. [With still deeper emotion.] But at that time I could not resign myself to my loss; and that was why I took Erhart to me. I won him entirely. Won his whole, warm, trustful childish heart—until—— Oh!

BORKMAN.

Until what?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Until his mother—his mother in the flesh, I mean—took him from me again.

BORKMAN.

He had to leave you in any case; he had to come to town.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Wringing her hands.] Yes, but I cannot bear the solitude— the emptiness! I cannot bear the loss of your son's heart!

BORKMAN. [With an evil expression in his eyes.] H'm—I doubt whether you have lost it, Ella. Hearts are not so easily lost to a certain person—in the room below.

ELLA RENTHEIM. I have lost Erhart here, and she has won him back again. Or if not she, some one else. That is plain enough in the letters he writes me from time to time.

BORKMAN.

Then it is to take him back with you that you have come here?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Yes, if only it were possible——!

BORKMAN. It is possible enough, if you have set your heart upon it. For you have the first and strongest claims upon him.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Oh, claims, claims! What is the use of claims? If he is not mine of his own free will, he is not mine at all. And have him

I must! I must have my boy's heart, whole and undivided—now!
BORKMAN. You must remember that Erhart is well into his twenties. You could scarcely reckon on keeping his heart very long undivided, as you express it.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [With a melancholy smile.] It would not need to be for so very long.
BORKMAN. Indeed? I should have thought that when you want a thing, you want it to the end of your days.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
So I do. But that need not mean for very long.
BORKMAN.
[Taken aback.] What do you mean by that?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I suppose you know I have been in bad health for many years past?
BORKMAN.
Have you?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Do you not know that?
BORKMAN.
No, I cannot say I did——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Looking at him in surprise.] Has Erhart not told you so?
BORKMAN.
I really don't remember at the moment.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Perhaps he has not spoken of me at all?
BORKMAN. Oh, yes, I believe he has spoken of you. But the fact is, I so seldom see anything of him—scarcely ever. There is a certain person below that keeps him away from me. Keeps him away, you understand?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Are you quite sure of that, Borkman?
BORKMAN. Yes, absolutely sure. [Changing his tone.] And so you have been in bad health, Ella?
ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, I have. And this autumn I grew so much worse that I had to come to town and take better medical advice.
BORKMAN.
And you have seen the doctors already?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, this morning.
BORKMAN.
And what did they say to you?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
They gave me full assurance of what I had long suspected.
BORKMAN.
Well?

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Calmly and quietly.] My illness will never be cured, Borkman.

BORKMAN.

Oh, you must not believe that, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM. It is a disease that there is no help or cure for. The doctors can do nothing with it. They must just let it take its course. They cannot possibly check it; at most, they can allay the suffering. And that is always something.

BORKMAN. Oh, but it will take a long time to run its course. I am sure it will.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I may perhaps last out the winter, they told me.

BORKMAN.

[Without thinking.] Oh, well, the winter is long.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Quietly.] Long enough for me, at any rate.

BORKMAN. [Eagerly, changing the subject.] But what in all the world can have brought on this illness? You, who have always lived such a healthy and regular life? What can have brought it on?

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Looking at him.] The doctors thought that perhaps at one time in my life I had had to go through some great stress of emotion.

BORKMAN. [Firing up.] Emotion! Aha, I understand! You mean that it is my fault?

ELLA RENTHEIM. [With increasing inward agitation.] It is too late to go into that matter now! But I must have my heart's own child again before I go! It is so unspeakably sad for me to think that I must go away from all that is called life—away from sun, and light, and air—and not leave behind me one single human being who will think of me—who will remember me lovingly and mournfully—as a son remembers and thinks of the mother he has lost.

BORKMAN.

[After a short pause.] Take him, Ella, if you can win him.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[With animation.] Do you give your consent? Can you?

BORKMAN. [Gloomily.] Yes. And it is no great sacrifice either. For in any case he is not mine.

ELLA RENTHEIM. Thank you, thank you all the same for the sacrifice! But I have one thing more to beg of you—a great thing for me, Borkman.

BORKMAN.

Well, what is it?

ELLA RENTHEIM. I daresay you will think it childish of me—you will not understand——

BORKMAN.

Go on—tell me what it is.

ELLA RENTHEIM. When I die—as I must soon—I shall have a fair amount to leave behind me.

BORKMAN.
Yes, I suppose so.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
And I intend to leave it all to Erhart.
BORKMAN.
Well, you have really no one nearer to you than he.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Warmly.] No, indeed, I have no one nearer me than he.
BORKMAN.
No one of your own family. You are the last.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Nodding slowly.] Yes, that is just it. When I die, the name of Rentheim dies with me. And that is such a torturing thought to me. To be wiped out of existence—even to your very name——
BORKMAN.
[Firing up.] Ah, I see what you are driving at!
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Passionately.] Do not let this be my forte. Let Erhart bear my name after me!
BORKMAN. I understand you well enough. You want to save my son from having to bear his father's name. That is your meaning.
ELLA RENTHEIM. No, no, not that! I myself would have borne it proudly and gladly along with you! But a mother who is at the point of death—— There is more binding force in a name than you think or believe, Borkman.
BORKMAN. [Coldly and proudly.] Well and good, Ella. I am man enough to bear my own name alone.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Seizing and pressing his hand.] Thank you, thank you! Now there has been a full settlement between us! Yes, yes, let it be so! You have made all the atonement in your power. For when I have gone from the world, I shall leave Erhart Rentheim behind me!
[The tapestry door is thrown open. MRS. BORKMAN, with the large shawl over her head, stands in the doorway.
MRS. BORKMAN. [In violent agitation.] Never to his dying day shall Erhart be called by that name!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Shrinking back.] Gunhild!
BORKMAN. [Harshly and threateningly.] I allow no one to come up to my room!
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Advancing a step.] I do not ask your permission.
BORKMAN.
[Going towards her.] What do you want with me?
MRS. BORKMAN. I will fight with all my might for you. I will protect you from the powers of evil.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
The worst "powers of evil" are in yourself, Gunhild!
MRS. BORKMAN. [Harshly.] So be it then. [Menacingly, with upstretched

arm.] But this I tell you—he shall bear his father's name! And bear it aloft in honour again! My son's heart shall be mine—mine and no other's.
[She goes out by the tapestry door and shuts it behind her.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Shaken and shattered.] Borkman, Erhart's life will be wrecked in this storm. There must be an understanding between you and Gunhild. We must go down to her at once.
BORKMAN.
[Looking at her.] We? I too, do you mean?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Both you and I.
BORKMAN.
[Shaking his head.] She is hard, I tell you. Hard as the metal I once dreamed of hewing out of the rocks.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Then try it now!
[BORKMAN does not answer, but stands looking doubtfully at her.

ACT THIRD

MRS. BORKMAN's drawing room. The lamp is still burning on the table beside the sofa in front. The garden-room at the back is quite dark.
MRS. BORKMAN, with the shawl still over her head, enters, in violent agitation, by the hall door, goes up to the window, draws the curtain a little aside, and looks out; then she seats herself beside the stove, but immediately springs up again, goes to the bell-pull and rings. Stands beside the sofa, and waits a moment. No one comes. Then she rings again, this time more violently.
THE MAID presently enters from the hall. She looks sleepy and out of temper, and appears to have dressed in great haste.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Impatiently.] What has become of you, Malena? I have rung for you twice!
THE MAID.
Yes, ma'am, I heard you.
MRS. BORKMAN.
And yet you didn't come?
THE MAID.
[Sulkily.] I had to put some clothes on first, I suppose.
MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, you must dress yourself properly, and then you must run and fetch my son.
THE MAID.
[Looking at her in astonishment.] You want me to fetch Mr. Erhart?
MRS. BORKMAN. Yes; tell him he must come home to me at once; I want

to speak to him.
THE MAID. [Grumbling.] Then I'd better go to the bailiff's and call up the coachman.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Why?
THE MAID.
To get him to harness the sledge. The snow's dreadful to-night.
MRS. BORKMAN. Oh, that doesn't matter; only make haste and go. It's just round the corner.
THE MAID.
Why, ma'am you can't call that just round the corner!
MRS. BORKMAN.
Of course it is. Don't you know Mr. Hinkel's villa?
THE MAID. [With malice.] Oh, indeed! It's there Mr. Erhart is this evening?
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Taken aback.] Why, where else should he be?
THE MAID. [With a slight smile.] Well, I only thought he might be where he usually is.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Where do you mean?
THE MAID.
At Mrs. Wilton's, as they call her.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Mrs. Wilton's? My son isn't so often there.
THE MAID. [Half muttering.] I've heard say as he's there every day of his life.
MRS. BORKMAN. That's all nonsense, Malena. Go straight to Mr. Hinkel's and try to to get hold of him.
THE MAID.
[With a toss of her head.] Oh, very well; I'm going.
[She is on the point of going out by the hall, but just at that moment the hall door is opened, and ELLA RENTHEIM and BORKMAN appear on the threshold.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Staggers a step backwards.] What does this mean?
THE MAID.
[Terrified, instinctively folding her hands.] Lord save us!
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Whispers to THE MAID.] Tell him he must come this instant.
THE MAID.
[Softly.] Yes, ma'am.
[ELLA RENTHEIM and, after her, BORKMAN enter the room. THE MAID sidles behind them to the door, goes out, and closes it after her.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Having recovered her self-control, turns to ELLA.]

What does he want down here in my room?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
He wants to come to an understanding with you, Gunhild.
MRS. BORKMAN.
He has never tried that before.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
He is going to, this evening.
MRS. BORKMAN.
The last time we stood face to face—it was in the Court, when I was summoned to give an account——
BORKMAN. [Approaching.] And this evening it is *I* who will give an account of myself.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Looking at him.] You?
BORKMAN.
Not of what I have done amiss. All the world knows that.
MRS. BORKMAN. [With a bitter sigh.] Yes, that is true; all the world knows that.
BORKMAN. But it does not know why I did it; why I had to do it. People do not understand that I had to, because I was myself—because I was John Gabriel Borkman—myself, and not another. And that is what I will try to explain to you.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Shaking her head.] It is of no use. Temptations and promptings acquit no one.
BORKMAN.
They may acquit one in one's own eyes.
MRS. BORKMAN. [With a gesture of repulsion.] Oh, let all that alone! I have thought over that black business of yours enough and to spare.
BORKMAN. I too. During those five endless years in my cell—and elsewhere —I had time to think it over. And during the eight years up there in the gallery I have had still more ample time. I have re-tried the whole case—by myself. Time after time I have re-tried it. I have been my own accuser, my own defender, and my own judge. I have been more impartial than any one else could be—that I venture to say. I have paced up and down the gallery there, turning every one of my actions upside down and inside out. I have examined them from all sides as unsparingly, as pitilessly, as any lawyer of them all. And the final judgment I have always come to is this: the one person I have sinned against is—myself.
MRS. BORKMAN.
And what about me? What about your son?
BORKMAN.
You and he are included in what I mean when I say myself.
MRS. BORKMAN. And what about the hundreds of others, then—the people you are said to have ruined?
BORKMAN. [More vehemently.] I had power in my hands! And then I felt

the irresistible vocation within me! The prisoned millions lay all over the country, deep in the bowels of the earth, calling aloud to me! They shrieked to me to free them! But no one else heard their cry—I alone had ears for it.

MRS. BORKMAN.

Yes, to the branding of the name of Borkman.

BORKMAN. If the others had had the power, do you think they would not have acted exactly as I did?

MRS. BORKMAN.

No one, no one but you would have done it!

BORKMAN. Perhaps not. But that would have been because they had not my brains. And if they had done it, it would not have been with my aims in view. The act would have been a different act. In short, I have acquitted myself.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Softly and appealingly.] Oh, can you say that so confidently, Borkman?

BORKMAN. [Nodding.] Acquitted myself on that score. But then comes the great, crushing self-accusation.

MRS. BORKMAN.

What is that?

BORKMAN. I have skulked up there and wasted eight precious years of my life! The very day I was set free, I should have gone forth into the world—out into the steel-hard, dreamless world of reality! I should have begun at the bottom and swung myself up to the heights anew—higher than ever before—in spite of all that lay between.

MRS. BORKMAN. Oh, it would have been the same thing over again; take my word for that.

BORKMAN. [Shakes his head, and looks at her with a sententious air.] It is true that nothing new happens; but what has happened does not repeat itself either. It is the eye that transforms the action. The eye, born anew, transforms the old action. [Breaking off.] But you do not understand this.

MRS. BORKMAN.

[Curtly.] No, I do not understand it.

BORKMAN. Ah, that is just the curse—I have never found one single soul to understand me.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Looking at him.] Never, Borkman?

BORKMAN. Except one—perhaps. Long, long ago. In the days when I did not think I needed understanding. Since then, at any rate, no one has understood me! There has been no one alive enough to my needs to be afoot and rouse me—to ring the morning bell for me—to call me up to manful work anew. And to impress upon me that I had done nothing inexpiable.

MRS. BORKMAN. [With a scornful laugh.] So, after all, you require to have that impressed on you from without?

BORKMAN. [With increasing indignation.] Yes, when the whole world

hisses in chorus that I have sunk never to rise again, there come moments when I almost believe it myself. [Raising his head.] But then my inmost assurance rises again triumphant; and that acquits me.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Looking harshly at him.] Why have you never come and asked me for what you call understanding?
BORKMAN.
What use would it have been to come to you?
MRS. BORKMAN. [With a gesture of repulsion.] You have never loved anything outside yourself; that is the secret of the whole matter.
BORKMAN.
[Proudly.] I have loved power.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Yes, power!
BORKMAN. The power to create human happiness in wide, wide circles around me!
MRS. BORKMAN. You had once the power to make me happy. Have you used it to that end?
BORKMAN. [Without looking at her.] Some one must generally go down in a shipwreck.
MRS. BORKMAN. And your own son! Have you used your power—have you lived and laboured—to make him happy?
BORKMAN.
I do not know him.
MRS. BORKMAN.
No, that is true. You do not even know him.
BORKMAN.
[Harshly.] You, his mother, have taken care of that!
MRS. BORKMAN. [Looking at him with a lofty air.] Oh, you do not know what I have taken care of!
BORKMAN.
You?
MRS. BORKMAN.
Yes, I. I alone.
BORKMAN.
Then tell me.
MRS. BORKMAN.
I have taken care of your memory.
BORKMAN. [With a short dry laugh.] My memory? Oh, indeed! It sounds almost as if I were dead already.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[With emphasis.] And so you are.
BORKMAN. [Slowly.] Yes, perhaps you are right. [Firing up.] But no, no! Not yet! I have been close to the verge of death. But now I have awakened. I have come to myself. A whole life lies before me yet. I can see it awaiting me, radiant and quickening. And you—you shall see it too.

MRS. BORKMAN. [Raising her hand.] Never dream of life again! Lie quiet where you are.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Shocked.] Gunhild! Gunhild, how can you——!
MRS. BORKMAN. [Not listening to her.] I will raise the monument over your grave.
BORKMAN.
The pillar of shame, I suppose you mean?
MRS. BORKMAN. [With increasing excitement.] Oh, no, it shall be no pillar of metal or stone. And no one shall be suffered to carve any scornful legend on the monument I shall raise. There shall be, as it were, a quickset hedge of trees and bushes, close, close around your tomb. They shall hide away all the darkness that has been. The eyes of men and the thoughts of men shall no longer dwell on John Gabriel Borkman!
BORKMAN. [Hoarsely and cuttingly.] And this labour of love you will perform?
MRS. BORKMAN. Not by my own strength. I cannot think of that. But I have brought up one to help me, who shall live for this alone. His life shall be so pure and high and bright, that your burrowing in the dark shall be as though it had never been!
BORKMAN. [Darkly and threateningly.] If it is Erhart you mean, say so at once!
MRS. BORKMAN. [Looking him straight in the eyes.] Yes, it is Erhart; my son; he whom you are ready to renounce in atonement for your own acts.
BORKMAN.
[With a look towards ELLA.] In atonement for my blackest sin.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Repelling the idea.] A sin towards a stranger only. Remember the sin towards me! [Looking triumphantly at them both.] But he will not obey you! When I cry out to him in my need, he will come to me! It is with me that he will remain! With me, and never with any one else. [Suddenly listens, and cries.] I hear him! He is here, he is here! Erhart!
[ERHART BORKMAN hastily tears open the hall door, and enters the room. He is wearing an overcoat and has his hat on.
ERHART. [Pale and anxious.] Mother! What in Heaven's name——! [Seeing BORKMAN, who is standing beside the doorway leading into the garden-room, he starts and takes off his hat. After a moment's silence, he asks:] What do you want with me, mother? What has happened?
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Stretching her arms towards him.] I want to see you, Erhart!
I want to have you with me, always!
ERHART.
[Stammering.] Have me——? Always? What do you mean by that?
MRS. BORKMAN. I will have you, I say! There is some one who wants to take you away from me!
ERHART.

[Recoiling a step.] Ah—so you know?
MRS. BORKMAN.
Yes. Do you know it, too?
ERHART.
[Surprised, looking at her.] Do *I* know it? Yes, of course.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Aha, so you have planned it all out! Behind my back! Erhart!
Erhart!
ERHART.
[Quickly.] Mother, tell me what it is you know!
MRS. BORKMAN. I know everything. I know that your aunt has come here to take you from me.
ERHART.
Aunt Ella!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Oh, listen to me a moment, Erhart!
MRS. BORKMAN. [Continuing.] She wants me to give you up to her. She wants to stand in your mother's place to you. Erhart! She wants you to be her son, and not mine, from this time forward. She wants you to inherit everything from her; to renounce your own name and take hers instead!
ERHART.
Aunt Ella, is this true?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, it is true.
ERHART. I knew nothing of this. Why do you want to have me with you again?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Because I feel that I am losing you here.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Hardly.] You are losing him to me—yes. And that is just as it should be.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Looking beseechingly at him.] Erhart, I cannot afford to lose you. For, I must tell you I am a lonely—dying woman.
ERHART.
Dying——?
ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, dying. Will you came and be with me to the end? Attach yourself wholly to me? Be to me, as though you were my own child——?
MRS. BORKMAN. [Interrupting.] And forsake your mother, and perhaps your mission in life as well? Will you, Erhart?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I am condemned to death. Answer me, Erhart.
ERHART. [Warmly, with emotion.] Aunt Ella, you have been unspeakably good to me. With you I grew up in as perfect happiness as any boy can ever have known——
MRS. BORKMAN.

Erhart. Erhart!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Oh, how glad I am that you can still say that!
ERHART. But I cannot sacrifice myself to you now. It is not possible for me to devote myself wholly to taking a son's place towards you.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Triumphing.] Ah, I knew it! You shall not have him! You shall not have him, Ella!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Sadly.] I see it. You have won him back.
MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, yes! Mine he is, and mine he shall remain! Erhart, say it is so, dear; we two have still a long way to go together, have we not?
ERHART. [Struggling with himself.] Mother, I may as well tell you plainly——
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Eagerly.] What?
ERHART. I am afraid it is only a very little way you and I can go together.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Stands as though thunderstruck.] What do you mean by that?
ERHART. [Plucking up spirit.] Good heavens, mother, I am young, after all! I feel as if the close air of this room must stifle me in the end.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Close air? Here—with me?
ERHART.
Yes, here with you, mother.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Then come with me, Erhart.
ERHART. Oh, Aunt Ella, it's not a whit better with you. It's different, but no better—no better for me. It smells of rose-leaves and lavender there too; it is as airless there as here.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Shaken, but having recovered her composure with an effort.]
Airless in your mother's room, you say!
ERHART. [In growing impatience.] Yes, I don't know how else to express it. All this morbid watchfulness and—and idolisation, or whatever you like to call it—— I can't endure it any longer!
MRS. BORKMAN. [Looking at him with deep solemnity.] Have you forgotten what you have consecrated your life to, Erhart?
ERHART. [With an outburst.] Oh, say rather what you have consecrated my life to. You, you have been my will. You have never given me leave to have any of my own. But now I cannot bear this yoke any longer. I am young; remember that, mother. [With a polite, considerate glance towards BORKMAN.] I cannot consecrate my life to making atonement for another—whoever that other may be.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Seized with growing anxiety.] Who is it that has transformed you, Erhart?

ERHART.

[Struck.] Who? Can you not conceive that it is I myself?

MRS. BORKMAN. No, no, no! You have come under some strange power. You are not in your mother's power any longer; nor in your—your foster-mother's either.

ERHART. [With laboured defiance.] I am in my own power, mother! And working my own will!

BORKMAN. [Advancing towards ERHART.] Then perhaps my hour has come at last.

ERHART. [Distantly and with measured politeness.] How so! How do you mean, sir?

MRS. BORKMAN.

[Scornfully.] Yes, you may well ask that.

BORKMAN. [Continuing undisturbed.] Listen, Erhart—will you not cast in your lot with your father? It is not through any other man's life that a man who has fallen can be raised up again. These are only empty fables that have been told to you down here in the airless room. If you were to set yourself to live your life like all the saints together, it would be of no use whatever to me.

ERHART.

[With measured respectfulness.] That is very true indeed.

BORKMAN. Yes, it is. And it would be of no use either if I should resign myself to wither away in abject penitence. I have tried to feed myself upon hopes and dreams, all through these years. But I am not the man to be content with that; and now I mean to have done with dreaming.

ERHART.

[With a slight bow.] And what will—what will you do, sir?

BORKMAN. I will work out my own redemption, that is what I will do. I will begin at the bottom again. It is only through his present and his future that a man can atone for his past. Through work, indefatigable work, for all that, in my youth, seemed to give life its meaning—and that now seems a thousand times greater than it did then. Erhart, will you join with me and help me in this new life?

MRS. BORKMAN.

[Raising her hand warningly.] Do not do it, Erhart!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Warmly.] Yes, yes do it! Oh, help him, Erhart!

MRS. BORKMAN.

And you advise him to do that? You, the lonely dying woman.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I don't care about myself.

MRS. BORKMAN.

No, so long as it is not I that take him from you.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Precisely so, Gunhild.

BORKMAN.
Will you, Erhart?
ERHART. [Wrung with pain.] Father, I cannot now. It is utterly impossible!
BORKMAN.
What do you want to do then?
ERHART. [With a sudden glow.] I am young! I want to live, for once in a way, as well as other people! I want to live my own life!
ELLA RENTHEIM. You cannot give up two or three little months to brighten the close of a poor waning life?
ERHART.
I cannot, Aunt, however much I may wish to.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Not for the sake of one who loves you so dearly?
MRS. BORKMAN. [Looking sharply at him.] And your mother has no power over you either, any more?
ERHART. I will always love you, mother; but I cannot go on living for you alone. This is no life for me.
BORKMAN. Then come and join with me, after all! For life, life means work, Erhart. Come, we two will go forth into life and work together!
ERHART. [Passionately.] Yes, but I don't want to work now! For I am young! That's what I never realised before; but now the knowledge is tingling through every vein in my body. I will not work! I will only live, live, live!
MRS. BORKMAN.
[With a cry of divination.] Erhart, what will you live for?
ERHART.
[With sparkling eyes.] For happiness, mother!
MRS. BORKMAN.
And where do you think you can find that?
ERHART.
I have found it, already!
MRS. BORKMAN. [Shrieks.] Erhart! [ERHART goes quickly to the hall door and throws it open.]
ERHART.
[Calls out.] Fanny, you can come in now!
[MRS. WILTON, in outdoor wraps, appears on the threshold.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[With uplifted hands.] Mrs. Wilton!
MRS. WILTON. [Hesitating a little, with an enquiring glance at ERHART.] Do you want me to——?
ERHART.
Yes, now you can come in. I have told them everything.
[MRS. WILTON comes forward into the room. ERHART closes the door behind her. She bows formally to BORKMAN, who returns her bow in silence. A short pause.

MRS. WILTON. [In a subdued but firm voice.] So the word has been spoken— and I suppose you all think I have brought a great calamity upon this house?
MRS. BORKMAN. [Slowly, looking hard at her.] You have crushed the last remnant of interest in life for me. [With an outburst.] But all of this—all this is utterly impossible!
MRS. WILTON.
I can quite understand that it must appear impossible to you,
Mrs. Borkman.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Yes, you can surely see for yourself that it is impossible.
Or what——?
MRS. WILTON. I should rather say that it seems highly improbable. But it's so, none the less.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Turning.] Are you really in earnest about this, Erhart?
ERHART. This means happiness for me, mother—all the beauty and happiness of life. That is all I can say to you.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Clenching her hands together; to MRS. WILTON.] Oh, how you have cajoled and deluded my unhappy son!
MRS. WILTON.
[Raising her head proudly.] I have done nothing of the sort.
MRS. BORKMAN.
You have not, say you!
MRS. WILTON. No. I have neither cajoled nor deluded him. Erhart came to me of his own free will. And of my own free will I went out half-way to meet him.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Measuring her scornfully with her eye.] Yes, indeed! That I can easily believe.
MRS. WILTON. [With self-control.] Mrs. Borkman, there are forces in human life that you seem to know very little about.
MRS. BORKMAN.
What forces, may I ask?
MRS. WILTON. The forces which ordain that two people shall join their lives together, indissolubly—and fearlessly.
MRS. BORKMAN. [With a smile.] I thought you were already indissolubly bound— to another.
MRS. WILTON.
[Shortly.] That other has deserted me.
MRS. BORKMAN.
But he is still living, they say.
MRS. WILTON.
He is dead to me.
ERHART. [Insistently.] Yes, mother, he is dead to Fanny. And besides, this other makes no difference to me!

MRS. BORKMAN.
[Looking sternly at him.] So you know all this—about the other.
ERHART.
Yes, mother, I know quite well—all about it!
MRS. BORKMAN.
And yet you can say that it makes no difference to you?
ERHART. [With defiant petulance.] I can only tell you that it is happiness I must have! I am young! I want to live, live, live!
MRS. BORKMAN.
Yes, you are young, Erhart. Too young for this.
MRS. WILTON. [Firmly and earnestly.] You must not think, Mrs. Borkman, that I haven't said the same to him. I have laid my whole life before him. Again and again I have reminded him that I am seven years older than he——
ERHART.
[Interrupting.] Oh, nonsense, Fanny—I knew that all the time.
MRS. WILTON.
But nothing—nothing was of any use.
MRS. BORKMAN. Indeed? Nothing? Then why did you not dismiss him without more ado? Close your door to him? You should have done that, and done it in time!
MRS. WILTON.
[Looks at her, and says in a low voice.] I could not do that,
Mrs. Borkman.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Why could you not?
MRS. WILTON.
Because for me too this meant happiness.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Scornfully.] H'm, happiness, happiness——
MRS. WILTON. I have never before known happiness in life. And I cannot possibly drive happiness away from me, merely because it comes so late.
MRS. BORKMAN.
And how long do you think this happiness will last?
ERHART. [Interrupting.] Whether it lasts or does not last, mother, it doesn't matter now!
MRS. BORKMAN. [In anger.] Blind boy that you are! Do you not see where all this is leading you?
ERHART. I don't want to look into the future. I don't want to look around me in any direction; I am only determined to live my own life—at last!
MRS. BORKMAN.
[With deep pain.] And you call this life, Erhart!
ERHART.
Don't you see how lovely she is!
MRS. BORKMAN. [Wringing her hands.] And I have to bear this load of

shame as well!
BORKMAN. [At the back, harshly and cuttingly.] Ho—you are used to bearing things of that sort, Gunhild!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Imploringly.] Borkman!
ERHART.
[Similarly.] Father!
MRS. BORKMAN.
Day after day I shall have to see my own son linked to a—a——
ERHART. [Interrupting her harshly.] You shall see nothing of the kind, mother! You may make your mind easy on that point. I shall not remain here.
MRS. WILTON.
[Quickly and with decision.] We are going away, Mrs. Borkman.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Turning pale.] Are you going away, too? Together, no doubt?
MRS. WILTON. [Nodding.] Yes, I am going abroad, to the south. I am taking a young girl with me. And Erhart is going along with us.
MRS. BORKMAN.
With you—and a young girl?
MRS. WILTON.
Yes. It is little Frida Foldal, whom I have had living with me.
I want her to go abroad and get more instruction in music.
MRS. BORKMAN.
So you are taking her with you?
MRS. WILTON.
Yes; I can't well send her out into the world alone.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Suppressing a smile.] What do you say to this, Erhart?
ERHART. [With some embarrassment, shrugging his shoulders.] Well, mother, since Fanny will have it so——
MRS. BORKMAN. [Coldly.] And when does this distinguished party set out, if one may ask?
MRS. WILTON. We are going at once—to-night. My covered sledge is waiting on the road, outside the Hinkels'.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Looking her from head to foot.] Aha! so that was what the party meant?
MRS. WILTON.
[Smiling.] Yes, Erhart and I were the whole party. And little
Frida, of course.
MRS. BORKMAN.
And where is she now?
MRS. WILTON.
She is sitting in the sledge waiting for us.
ERHART.
[In painful embarrassment.] Mother, surely you can understand?

I would have spared you all this—you and every one.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Looks at him, deeply pained.] You would have gone away from me without saying a good-bye?
ERHART. Yes, I thought that would be best; best for all of us. Our boxes were packed and everything settled. But of course when you sent for me, I—— [Holding out his hands to her.] Good-bye, mother.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[With a gesture of repulsion.] Don't touch me!
ERHART.
[Gently.] Is that your last word?
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Sternly.] Yes.
ERHART.
[Turning.] Good-bye to you, then, Aunt Ella.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Pressing his hands.] Good-bye, Erhart! And live your life— and be as happy—as happy as ever you can.
ERHART. Thanks, Aunt. [Bowing to BORKMAN.] Good-bye, father. [Whispers to MRS. WILTON.] Let us get away, the sooner the better.
MRS. WILTON.
[In a low voice.] Yes, let us.
MRS. BORKMAN. [With a malignant smile.] Mrs. Wilton, do you think you are acting quite wisely in taking that girl with you?
MRS. WILTON. [Returning the smile, half ironically, half seriously.] Men are so unstable, Mrs. Borkman. And women too. When Erhart is done with me—and I with him—then it will be well for us both that he, poor fellow, should have some one to fall back upon.
MRS. BORKMAN.
But you yourself?
MRS. WILTON.
Oh, I shall know what to do, I assure you. Good-bye to you all!
[She bows and goes out by the hall door. ERHART stands for a moment as though wavering; then he turns and follows her.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Dropping her folded hands.] Childless.

BORKMAN.
[As though awakening to a resolution.] Then out into the storm alone! My hat! My cloak!
[He goes hastily towards the door.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[In terror, stopping him.] John Gabriel, where are you going?
BORKMAN.
Out into the storm of life, I tell you. Let me go, Ella!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Holding him back.] No, no, I won't let you out! You are ill.

I can see it in your face!
BORKMAN.
Let me go, I tell you!
[He tears himself away from her, and goes out by the hall.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[In the doorway.] Help me to hold him, Gunhild!
MRS. BORKMAN. [Coldly and sharply, standing in the middle of the room.] I will not try to hold any one in all the world. Let them go away from me—both the one and the other! As far—as far as ever they please. [Suddenly, with a piercing shriek.] Erhart, don't leave me!
[She rushes with outstretched arms towards the door. ELLA RENTHEIM stops her.

ACT FOURTH

An open space outside the main building, which lies to the right. A projecting corner of it is visible, with a door approached by a flight of low stone steps. The background consists of steep fir-clad slopes, quite close at hand. On the left are small scattered trees, forming the margin of a wood. The snowstorm has ceased; but the newly fallen snow lies deep around. The fir-branches droop under heavy loads of snow. The night is dark, with drifting clouds. Now and then the moon gleams out faintly. Only a dim light is reflected from the snow.
BORKMAN, MRS. BORKMAN and ELLA RENTHEIM are standing upon the steps, BORKMAN leaning wearily against the wall of the house. He has an old-fashioned cape thrown over his shoulders, holds a soft grey felt hat in one hand and a thick knotted stick in the other. ELLA RENTHEIM carries her cloak over her arm. MRS. BORKMAN's great shawl has slipped down over her shoulders, so that her hair is uncovered.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Barring the way for MRS. BORKMAN.] Don't go after him, Gunhild!
MRS. BORKMAN. [In fear and agitation.] Let me pass, I say! He must not go away from me!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
It is utterly useless, I tell you! You will never overtake him.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Let me go, Ella! I will cry aloud after him all down the road.
And he must hear his mother's cry!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
He cannot hear you. You may be sure he is in the sledge already.
MRS. BORKMAN.
No, no; he can't be in the sledge yet!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
The doors are closed upon him long ago, believe me.

MRS. BORKMAN. [In despair.] If he is in the sledge, then he is there with her, with her—her!
BORKMAN. [Laughing gloomily.] Then he probably won't hear his mother's cry.
MRS. BORKMAN.
No, he will not hear it. [Listening.] Hark! what is that?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Also listening.] It sounds like sledge-bells.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[With a suppressed scream.] It is her sledge!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Perhaps it's another.
MRS. BORKMAN. No, no, it is Mrs. Wilton's covered sledge! I know the silver bells! Hark! Now they are driving right past here, at the foot of the hill!
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Quickly.] Gunhild, if you want to cry out to him, now is the time! Perhaps after all——! [The tinkle of the bells sounds close at hand, in the wood.] Make haste, Gunhild! Now they are right under us!
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Stands for a moment undecided, then she stiffens and says sternly and coldly.] No. I will not cry out to him. Let Erhart Borkman pass away from me—far, far away—to what he calls life and happiness.
[The sound dies away in the distance.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[After a moment.] Now the bells are out of hearing.
MRS. BORKMAN.
They sounded like funeral bells.
BORKMAN. [With a dry suppressed laugh.] Oho—it is not for me they are ringing to-night!
MRS. BORKMAN.
No, but for me—and for him who has gone from me.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Nodding thoughtfully.] Who knows if, after all, they may not be ringing in life and happiness for him, Gunhild.
MRS. BORKMAN. [With sudden animation, looking hard at her.] Life and happiness, you say!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
For a little while at any rate.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Could you endure to let him know life and happiness, with her?
ELLA RENTHEIM. [With warmth and feeling.] Indeed, I could, with all my heart and soul!
MRS. BORKMAN. [Coldly.] Then you must be richer than I am in the power of love.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Looking far away.] Perhaps it is the lack of love that keeps the power alive.

MRS. BORKMAN.
[Fixing her eyes on her.] If that is so, then I shall soon be as rich as you, Ella.
[She turns and goes into the house.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Stands for a time looking with a troubled expression at BORKMAN; then lays her hand cautiously on his shoulder.] Come, John—you must come in, too.
BORKMAN.
[As if wakening.] I?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Yes, this winter air is too keen for you; I can see that, John. So come—come in with me—into the house, into the warmth.
BORKMAN.
[Angrily.] Up to the gallery again, I suppose.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
No, rather into the room below.
BORKMAN. [His anger flaming forth.] Never will I set foot under that roof again!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Where will you go then? So late, and in the dark, John?
BORKMAN. [Putting on his hat.] First of all, I will go out and see to all my buried treasures.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Looking anxiously at him.] John—I don't understand you.
BORKMAN. [With laughter, interrupted by coughing.] Oh, it is not hidden plunder I mean; don't be afraid of that, Ella. [Stopping, and pointing outwards.] Do you see that man there? Who is it?
[VILHELM FOLDAL, in an old cape, covered with snow, with his hat-brim turned down, and a large umbrella in his hand, advances towards the corner of the house, laboriously stumbling through the snow. He is noticeably lame in his left foot.
BORKMAN.
Vilhelm! What do you want with me again?
FOLDAL.
[Looking up.] Good heavens, are you out on the steps, John Gabriel? [Bowing.] And Mrs. Borkman, too, I see.
BORKMAN.
[Shortly.] This is not Mrs. Borkman.
FOLDAL. Oh, I beg pardon. You see, I have lost my spectacles in the snow. But how is it that you, who never put your foot out of doors——?
BORKMAN. [Carelessly and gaily.] It is high time I should come out into the open air again, don't you see? Nearly three years in detention—five years in prison—eight years in the gallery up there——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Distressed.] Borkman, I beg you——

FOLDAL.
Ah yes, yes, yes!
BORKMAN.
But I want to know what has brought you here.
FOLDAL.
[Still standing at the foot of the steps.] I wanted to come up to you, John Gabriel. I felt I must come to you, in the gallery. Ah me, that gallery——!
BORKMAN.
Did you want to come up to me after I had shown you the door?
FOLDAL.
Oh, I couldn't let that stand in the way.
BORKMAN.
What have you done to your foot? I see you are limping?
FOLDAL.
Yes, what do you think—I have been run over.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Run over!
FOLDAL.
Yes, by a covered sledge.
BORKMAN.
Oho!
FOLDAL.
With two horses. They came down the hill at a tearing gallop. I couldn't get out of the way quick enough; and so——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
And so they ran over you?
FOLDAL. They came right down upon me, madam—or miss. They came right upon me and sent me rolling over and over in the snow—so that I lost my spectacles and got my umbrella broken. [Rubbing his leg.] And my ankle a little hurt too.
BORKMAN.
[Laughing inwardly.] Do you know who were in that sledge, Vilhelm?
FOLDAL. No, how could I see? It was a covered sledge, and the curtains were down. And the driver didn't stop a moment after he had sent me spinning. But it doesn't matter a bit, for—— [With an outburst.] Oh, I am so happy, so happy!

BORKMAN.
Happy?
FOLDAL. Well, I don't exactly know what to call it. But I think happy is the nearest word. For something wonderful has happened! And that is why I couldn't help—I had to come out and share my happiness with you, John Gabriel.

BORKMAN.
[Harshly.] Well, share away then!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Oh, but first take your friend indoors with you, Borkman.
BORKMAN.
[Sternly.] I have told you I will not go into the house.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
But don't you hear, he has been run over!
BORKMAN. Oh, we are all of us run over, sometime or other in life. The thing is to jump up again, and let no one see you are hurt.
FOLDAL. That is a profound saying, John Gabriel. But I can easily tell you my story out here, in a few words.
BORKMAN.
[More mildly.] Yes, please do, Vilhelm.
FOLDAL.
Well, now you shall hear! Only think, when I got home this evening after I had been with you, what did I find but a letter. Can you guess who it was from?
BORKMAN.
Possibly from your little Frida?
FOLDAL. Precisely! Think of your hitting on it at once! Yes, it was a long letter from Frida. A footman had brought it. And can you imagine what was in it?
BORKMAN.
Perhaps it was to say good-bye to her mother and you?
FOLDAL. Exactly! How good you are at guessing, John Gabriel! Yes, she tells me that Mrs. Wilton has taken such a fancy to her, and she is to go abroad with her and study music. And Mrs. Wilton has engaged a first-rate teacher who is to accompany them on the journey—and to read with Frida. For unfortunately she has been a good deal neglected in some branches, you see.
BORKMAN. [Shaken with inward laughter.] Of course, of course—I see it all quite clearly, Vilhelm.
FOLDAL. [Eagerly continuing.] And only think, she knew nothing about the arrangement until this evening; at that party, you know, h'm! And yet she found time to write to me. And the letter is such a beautiful one—so warm and affectionate, I assure you. There is not a trace of contempt for her father in it. And then what a delicate thought it was to say good-bye to us by letter—before she started. [Laughing.] But of course I can't let her go like that.
BORKMAN.
[Looks inquiringly at him.] How so?
FOLDAL. She tells me that they start early to-morrow morning; quite early.
BORKMAN.
Oh indeed—to-morrow? Does she tell you that?

FOLDAL. [Laughing and rubbing his hands.] Yes; but I know a trick worth two of that, you see! I am going straight up to Mrs. Wilton's——
BORKMAN.
This evening?
FOLDAL.
Oh, it's not so very late yet. And even if the house is shut up, I shall ring; without hesitation. For I must and will see Frida before she starts. Good-night, good-night!
[Makes a movement to go.
BORKMAN. Stop a moment, my poor Vilhelm; you may spare yourself that heavy bit of road.
FOLDAL.
Oh, you are thinking of my ankle——
BORKMAN.
Yes; and in any case you won't get in at Mrs. Wilton's.
FOLDAL. Yes, indeed I will. I'll go on ringing and knocking till some one comes and lets me in. For I must and will see Frida.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Your daughter has gone already, Mr. Foldal.
FOLDAL. [Stands as though thunderstruck.] Has Frida gone already! Are you quite sure? Who told you?
BORKMAN.
We had it from her future teacher.
FOLDAL.
Indeed? And who is he?
BORKMAN.
A certain Mr. Erhart Borkman.
FOLDAL. [Beaming with joy.] Your son, John Gabriel? Is he going with them?
BORKMAN. Yes; it is he that is to help Mrs. Wilton with little Frida's education.
FOLDAL.
Oh, Heaven be praised! Then the child is in the best of hands. But is it quite certain that they have started with her already?
BORKMAN.
They took her away in that sledge which ran you over in the road.
FOLDAL. [Clasping his hands.] To think that my little Frida was in that magnificent sledge!
BORKMAN. [Nodding.] Yes, yes, Vilhelm, your daughter has come to drive in her carriage. And Master Erhart, too. Tell me, did you notice the silver bells?
FOLDAL. Yes, indeed. Silver bells did you say? Were they silver? Real, genuine silver bells?
BORKMAN. You may be quite sure of that. Everything was genuine—both outside and in.

FOLDAL. [In quiet emotion.] Isn't it strange how fortune can sometimes befriend one? It is my—my little gift of song that has transmuted itself into music in Frida. So after all, it is not for nothing that I was born a poet. For now she is going forth into the great wide world, that I once yearned so passionately to see. Little Frida sets out in a splendid covered sledge with silver bells on the harness——

BORKMAN.

And runs over her father.

FOLDAL. [Happily.] Oh, pooh! What does it matter about me, if only the child——! Well, so I am too late, then, after all. I must go home again and comfort her mother. I left her crying in the kitchen.

BORKMAN.

Crying?

FOLDAL. [Smiling.] Yes, would you believe it, she was crying her eyes out when I came away.

BORKMAN.

And you are laughing, Vilhelm?

FOLDAL. Yes, *I* am, of course. But she, poor thing, she doesn't know any better, you see. Well, good-bye! It's a good thing I have the tramway so handy. Good-bye, good-bye, John Gabriel. Good-bye, Madam.

[He bows and limps laboriously out by the way he came.

BORKMAN.

[Stands silent for a moment, gazing before him.] Good-bye, Vilhelm! It is not the first time in your life that you've been run over, old friend.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Looking at him with suppressed anxiety.] You are so pale, John, so very pale.

BORKMAN.

That is the effect of the prison air up yonder.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

I have never seen you like this before.

BORKMAN.

No, for I suppose you have never seen an escaped convict before.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

Oh, do come into the house with me, John!

BORKMAN.

It is no use trying to lure me in. I have told you——

ELLA RENTHEIM.

But when I beg and implore you——? For your own sake——

[THE MAID opens the door, and stands in the doorway.

THE MAID. I beg your pardon. Mrs. Borkman told me to lock the front door now.

BORKMAN. [In a low voice, to ELLA.] You see, they want to lock me up again!

ELLA RENTHEIM. [To THE MAID.] Mr. Borkman is not quite well. He wants to have a little fresh air before coming in.
THE MAID.
But Mrs. Borkman told me to——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I shall lock the door. Just leave the key in the lock.
THE MAID.
Oh, very well; I'll leave it.
[She goes into the house again.
BORKMAN. [Stands silent for a moment, and listens; then goes hastily down the steps and out into the open space.] Now I am outside the walls, Ella! Now they will never get hold of me again!
ELLA RENTHEIM. [Who has gone down to him.] But you are a free man in there, too, John. You can come and go just as you please.
BORKMAN. [Softly, as though in terror.] Never under a roof again! It is so good to be out here in the night. If I went up into the gallery now, ceiling and walls would shrink together and crush me—crush me flat as a fly.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
But where will you go, then?
BORKMAN. I will simply go on, and on, and on. I will try if I cannot make my way to freedom, and life, and human beings again. Will you go with me, Ella?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
I? Now?
BORKMAN.
Yes, at once!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
But how far?
BORKMAN.
As far as ever I can.
ELLA RENTHEIM. Oh, but think what you are doing! Out in this raw, cold winter night——
BORKMAN. [Speaking very hoarsely.] Oho—my lady is concerned about her health? Yes, yes—I know it is delicate.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
It is your health I am concerned about.
BORKMAN.
Hohoho! A dead man's health! I can't help laughing at you,
Ella! [He moves onwards.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Following him: holding him back.] What did you call yourself?
BORKMAN. A dead man, I said. Don't you remember, Gunhild told me to lie quiet where I was?
ELLA RENTHEIM. [With resolution, throwing her cloak around her.] I will go with you, John.

BORKMAN.

Yes, we two belong to each other, Ella. [Advancing.] So come!

[They have gradually passed into the low wood on the left.
It conceals them little by little, until they are quite
lost to sight. The house and the open space disappear.
The landscape, consisting of wooded slopes and ridges,
slowly changes and grows wilder and wilder.

ELLA RENTHEIM's VOICE.

[Is heard in the wood to the right.] Where are we going, John?
I don't recognise this place.

BORKMAN's VOICE.

[Higher up.] Just follow my footprints in the snow!

ELLA RENTHEIM's VOICE.

But why need we climb so high?

BORKMAN's VOICE.

[Nearer at hand.] We must go up the winding path.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Still hidden.] Oh, but I can't go much further.

BORKMAN. [On the verge of the wood to the right.] Come, come! We are not far from the view now. There used to be a seat there.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Appearing among the trees.] Do you remember it?

BORKMAN.

You can rest there.

[They have emerged upon a small high-lying, open plateau in the wood. The mountain rises abruptly behind them. To the left, far below, an extensive fiord landscape, with high ranges in the distance, towering one above the other. On the plateau, to the left, a dead fir-tree with a bench under it. The snow lies deep upon the plateau.

[BORKMAN and, after him, ELLA RENTHEIM enter from the right
and wade with difficulty through the snow.

BORKMAN.

[Stopping at the verge of the steep declivity on the left.]
Come here, Ella, and you shall see.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Coming up to him.] What do you want to show me, John?

BORKMAN. [Pointing outwards.] Do you see how free and open the country lies before us—away to the far horizon?

ELLA RENTHEIM. We have often sat on this bench before, and looked out into a much, much further distance.

BORKMAN.

It was a dreamland we then looked out over.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Nodding sadly.] It was the dreamland of our life, yes. And now that land is buried in snow. And the old tree is dead.

BORKMAN. [Not listening to her.] Can you see the smoke of the great

steamships out on the fiord?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
No.
BORKMAN. I can. They come and they go. They weave a network of fellowship all round the world. They shed light and warmth over the souls of men in many thousands of homes. That was what I dreamed of doing.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Softly.] And it remained a dream.
BORKMAN. It remained a dream, yes. [Listening.] And hark, down by the river, dear! The factories are working! My factories! All those that I would have created! Listen! Do you hear them humming? The night shift is on—so they are working night and day. Hark! hark! the wheels are whirling and the bands are flashing—round and round and round. Can't you hear, Ella?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
No.
BORKMAN.
I can hear it.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Anxiously.] I think you are mistaken, John.
BORKMAN. [More and more fired up.] Oh, but all these—they are only like the outworks around the kingdom, I tell you!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
The kingdom, you say? What kingdom?
BORKMAN. My kingdom, of course! The kingdom I was on the point of conquering when I—when I died.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Shaken, in a low voice.] Oh, John, John!
BORKMAN. And now there it lies—defenceless, masterless—exposed to all the robbers and plunderers. Ella, do you see the mountain chains there—far away? They soar, they tower aloft, one behind the other! That is my vast, my infinite, inexhaustible kingdom!
ELLA RENTHEIM.
Oh, but there comes an icy blast from that kingdom, John!
BORKMAN. That blast is the breath of life to me. That blast comes to me like a greeting from subject spirits. I seem to touch them, the prisoned millions; I can see the veins of metal stretch out their winding, branching, luring arms to me. I saw them before my eyes like living shapes, that night when I stood in the strong-room with the candle in my hand. You begged to be liberated, and I tried to free you. But my strength failed me; and the treasure sank back into the deep again. [With outstretched hands.] But I will whisper it to you here in the stillness of the night: I love you, as you lie there spellbound in the deeps and the darkness! I love you, unborn treasures, yearning for the light! I love you, with all your shining train of power and glory! I love you, love you, love you!
ELLA RENTHEIM. [In suppressed but rising agitation.] Yes, your love is

still down there, John. It has always been rooted there. But here, in the light of day, here there was a living, warm, human heart that throbbed and glowed for you. And this heart you crushed. Oh worse than that! Ten times worse! You sold it for—for——

BORKMAN. [Trembles; a cold shudder seems to go through him.] For the kingdom—and the power—and the glory—you mean?

ELLA RENTHEIM. Yes, that is what I mean. I have said it once before to-night: you have murdered the love-life in the woman who loved you. And whom you loved in return, so far as you could love any one. [With uplifted arm.] And therefore I prophesy to you, John Gabriel Borkman—you will never touch the price you demanded for the murder. You will never enter in triumph into your cold, dark kingdom!

BORKMAN. [Staggers to the bench and seats himself heavily.] I almost fear your prophecy will come true, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Going up to him.] You must not fear it, John. That is the best thing that can happen to you.

BORKMAN.

[With a shriek; clutching at his breast.] Ah——! [Feebly.]
Now it let me go again.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Shaking him.] What was it, John?

BORKMAN. [Sinking down against the back of the seat.] It was a hand of ice that clutched at my heart.

ELLA RENTHEIM.

John! Did you feel the ice-hand again!

BORKMAN.

[Murmurs.] No. No ice-hand. It was a metal hand.

[He sinks right down upon the bench.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Tears off her cloak and throws it over him.] Lie still where you are! I will go and bring help for you.

[She goes a step or two towards the right; then she stops, returns, and carefully feels his pulse and touches his face.

ELLA RENTHEIM. [Softly and firmly.] No. It is best so, John Borkman. Best for you.

[She spreads the cloak closer around him, and sinks down in the snow in front of the bench. A short silence.

[MRS. BORKMAN, wrapped in a mantle, comes through the wood on the right. THE MAID goes before her carrying a lantern.

THE MAID. [Throwing the light upon the snow.] Yes, yes, ma'am, here are their tracks.

MRS. BORKMAN. [Peering around.] Yes, here they are! They are sitting there on the bench. [Calls.] Ella!

ELLA RENTHEIM.

[Rising.] Are you looking for us?

MRS. BORKMAN.
[Sternly.] Yes, you see I have to.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Pointing.] Look, there he lies, Gunhild.
MRS. BORKMAN.
Sleeping?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
A long, deep sleep, I think.
MRS. BORKMAN. [With an outburst.] Ella! [Controls herself and asks in a low voice.] Did he do it—of his own accord?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
No.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Relieved.] Not by his own hand then?
ELLA RENTHEIM.
No. It was an ice-cold metal hand that gripped him by the heart.
MRS. BORKMAN. [To THE MAID.] Go for help. Get the men to come up from the farm.
THE MAID.
Yes, I will, ma'am. [To herself.] Lord save us!
[She goes out through the wood to the right.
MRS. BORKMAN.
[Standing behind the bench.] So the night air has killed him——
ELLA RENTHEIM.
So it appears.
MRS. BORKMAN.
——strong man that he was.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Coming in front of the bench.] Will you not look at him, Gunhild?
MRS. BORKMAN. [With a gesture of repulsion.] No, no, no. [Lowering her voice.] He was a miner's son, John Gabriel Borkman. He could not live in the fresh air.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
It was rather the cold that killed him.
MRS. BORKMAN. [Shakes her head.] The cold, you say? The cold—that had killed him long ago.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
[Nodding to her.] Yes—and changed us two into shadows.
MRS. BORKMAN.
You are right there.
ELLA RENTHEIM. [With a painful smile.] A dead man and two shadows—that is what the cold has made of us.
MRS. BORKMAN. Yes, the coldness of heart.—And now I think we two may hold out our hands to each other, Ella.

ELLA RENTHEIM.
I think we may, now.
MRS. BORKMAN.
We twin sisters—over him we have both loved.
ELLA RENTHEIM.
We two shadows—over the dead man.
[MRS. BORKMAN behind the bench, and ELLA RENTHEIM in front of it, take each other's hand.
THE END

Freeriver Community
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John Gabriel Borkman by Henrik Ibsen - The Borkman family fortunes are dwindling due to the imprisonment of John Gabriel who used his position as a bank manager to gamble with his investors' money. The action of the play takes place eight years after Borkman's release when the family discuss young Erhart Borkman's future.

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